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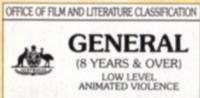
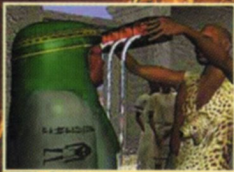
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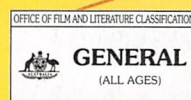
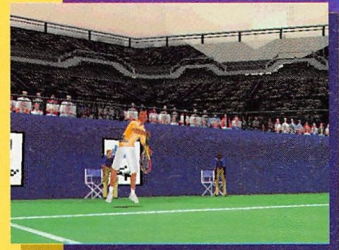
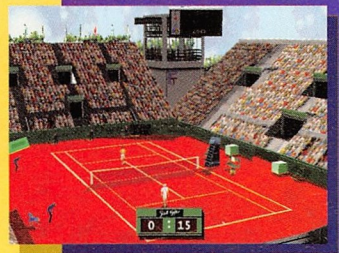
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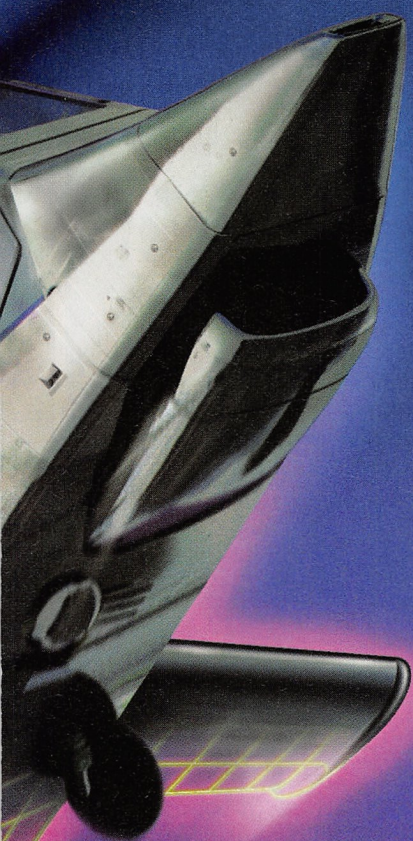


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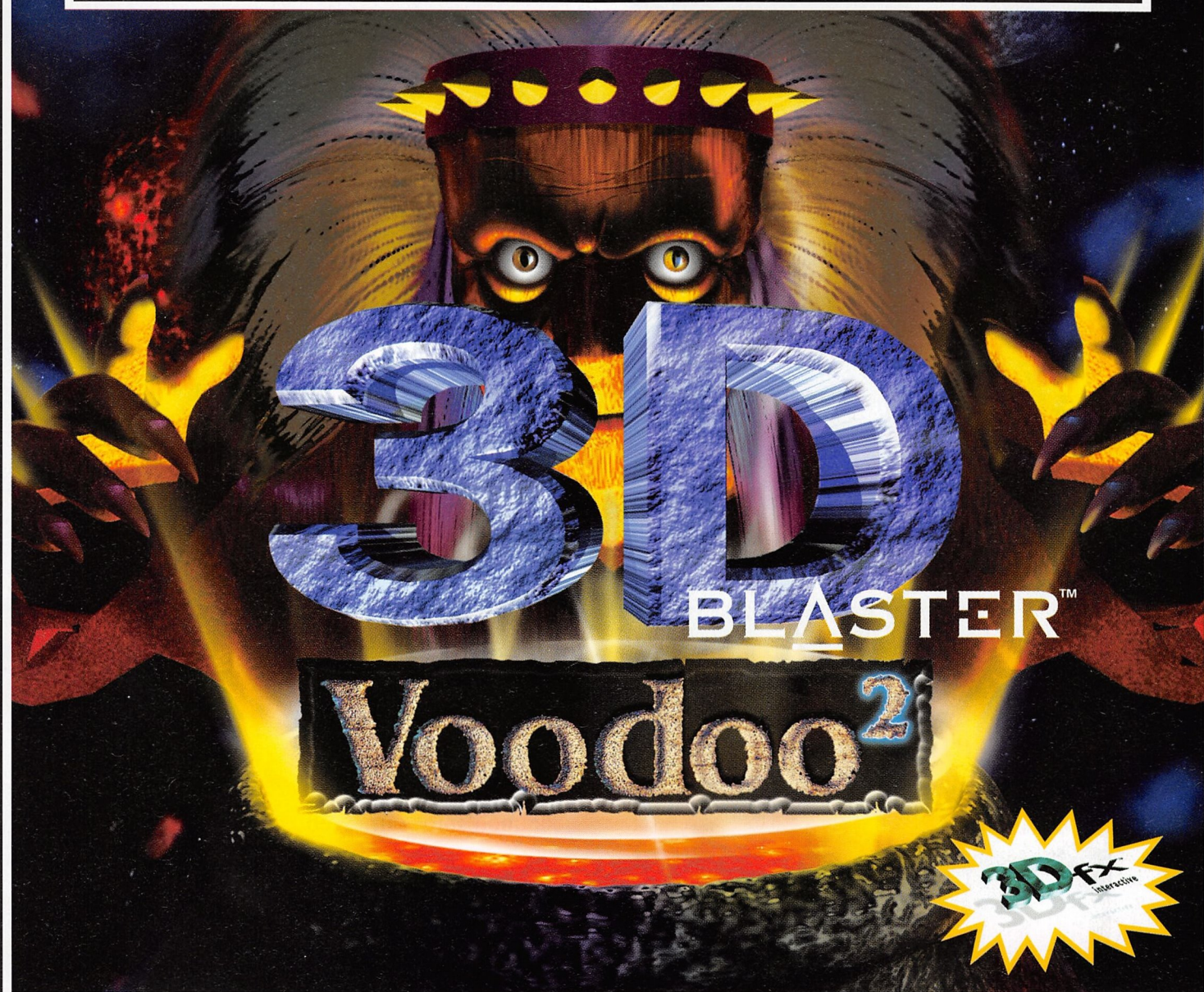


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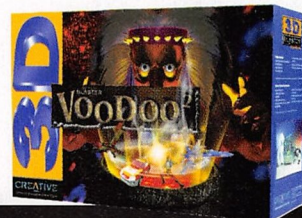
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What we're playing: Starcraft, Unreal, Battlezone, World Cup 98, Resident Evil 2, Mac Diablo

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Quake is Dead



And so is DOS, Elvis and polystyrene burger packaging. But it - and they, aren't, of course. It's all so easy to say though.

Unreal is the Quake-Killer we've all been waiting for. At least, it is in terms of simply being a far better game overall. But as for killing-off Quake...

Sorry, it just ain't gonna happen.

Quake, like the everlasting reign of a determined dictator, will need a mighty shove to dethrone. Just look at the snail's pace migration of online deathmatch players from Quake to Quake 2. No, Unreal should be welcomed warmly not because it represents a threat to Quake, but because it compliments it.

Despite some valiant and thoroughly worthy attempts to steal a slice of the Quake pie, nothing has even come close. Until now.

Quake and in general, first-person action game addicts, simply want a new experience. So much so, that they'll invest time and money playing a new first-person game even if it's garbage. It all stems from the incredible immersion these games deliver. One taste and you're in. Reality may or may not bite for you, but either way, these games deliver an almost out of body fantasy experience, that, for the duration of the playing, leaves the real world on the other side of the universe.

But it's a quality experience we yearn. Remember the electric thrill you felt when first you saw Doom? Feel it again with Unreal. I won't spend any time here telling you just how utterly amazing Unreal is, that's what the

review that starts on page 62 is for. Suffice to say; it's mindblowing.

But Unreal does not signal the end of the Quake-era. In between regular addiction-fixing Quake deathmatches, you/we/I will mind-meld with the single-player Unreal game (which is beyond compare, and I urge all online-only players who brag that they never play in single-player mode to give it a go, it's an essential gaming thrill). By then Unreal's popularity as a deathmatch game will have kicked in (safe bet) and for once, we will have an alternative to Quake. One that won't disappear after a couple of hot months, but will grow and evolve just like Quake has.

Deathmatch in each feels very different, which is why both will thrive. You'll need a whole new set of skills to cut in Unreal, but don't get too rusty at Quake yet...

Ben Mansill
Editor



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Thus Ben spake.

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Control and play guides for the game demos on the CD. Tech support info too, just in case something doesn't work the way it should.

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Activision announce a game based on the Soldier of Fortune magazine, Microsoft's Scottish factory burgled and 200,000 Certificates of Authenticity go missing, Diamond's takeover bid for arch-rival Orchid and much more.

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Join Club PowerPlay and be in the running to win the highly desirable Sony 400PS Platinum Trinitron 19" monitor.



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Sound cards are finally experiencing their long-overdue technical leap forward. We test the new breed of PCI sound cards.

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No longer are joysticks thoughtlessly modeled on Nature's Miracle, now the Law of Ergonomics is being re-written to make gaming a richer experience.

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11 of the fastest 56k modems are tested. Can 56k deliver the online performance gamers demand?

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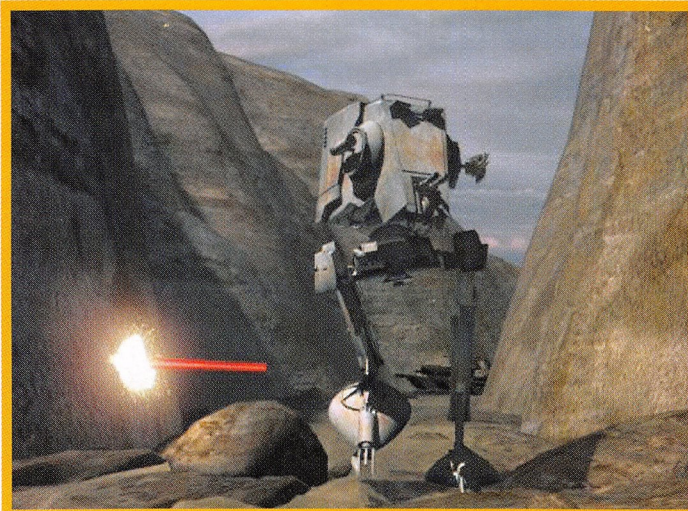
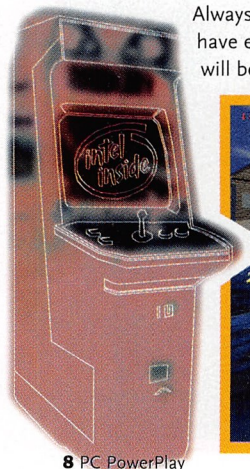
While Intel have abandoned Socket 7 in favour of their proprietary Slot 1 plug for the Pentium II, rivals AMD are still squeezing stunning performance from the old dog. We test the hottest motherboards available.

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HOME ARCADE

Always looking for new ways to deliver the fun we want, Intel have entered the arcade. Soon, the magic of Arcade Gaming will be available for your home PC.



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Our team of experts cast their critical gaze over the gaming months ahead.

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DIVERSIONS

Australian Infopaedia 100

The wait is over. Finally an encyclopaedia that recognises that America isn't the only country in the world.

Learn to Program Basic 101

We scoffed and derided, then installed. This thing is fantastic! Digitize your kids from an early age and teach them programming instead of social skills!

GAMEPLAY

Starcraft Strategy Guide 102

Vanquishing hordes of rampaging aliens ain't no walk in the park. Our Chief Xenophobe Peter Sharpe shares the wisdom gained from 100's of hours of playing this superb RTS.

Tips'n'Tactics 106

Yes readers, it's a New Section! Struggling to contain our excitement, we managed to pen this compendium of useful game tips. Great news! We'll be doing it again next month! And the month after, and the month after...

Oracle 108

The Oracle wants to help you. Write in and complain about the hard games and Oracle will see you through.

Code 110

Cheating in games is dishonourable and sad. Here are some great cheats for you to use to destroy your reputation.



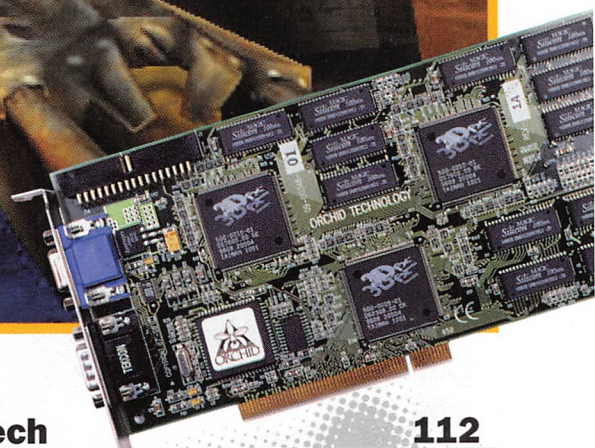
TECH

Graphics Tech 112

Benchtested: The Orchid Righteous II Voodoo 2 and the Dooin Media Camp. Plus, all the latest developments in graphics technology. Includes 3D Tech News.

Setup 116

Q & A for your technical dilemmas. Write in your worries and we'll right them.



ONLINE

Feature 118

PLAYER KILLERS, KILLING THE GAME?

Online gaming is not the haven of love and warmth it once was. We examine the phenomenon of Player Killers - gamers who seek to destroy the spirit of the game.



Build your own web page 122

You've scanned a photo of your pet dog, written a humble piece about yourself and are ready to webify yourself for the world to appreciate. We show you how.

The Far Site 124

Just for you, we find the hottest sites on the internet, and because we get off on this sort of thing, we rate them.

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Wizard's Crown charmed us back in 1985, so Mr Wildgoose dusted off the 5.25" floppies, installed and discovered that nostalgia isn't everlasting.



CD GUIDE

12 Demos including Forsaken and Quest for Glory 5

Starting the PC PowerPlay CD

Simply place the CD in your PC's CD, close the door and let Win 95's Autoplay take over. If you have disabled Autoplay, Open or Explore the CD and double click on RUNME.BAT

Issue 25 Ancient Evil

If you had problems with the demo crashing near the end, simply copy it from the CD to your hard drive and run it from there. All sorted!

cdtech@powerplay.next.com.au

Faulty CDs will be replaced free of charge. Send it, together with a description of the error, to:

PC PowerPlay

CD Returns

Reply Paid 634

78 Renwick St

Redfern

NSW 2016 (No postage required)

The Games

Forsaken

Acclaim

Action

\games\forsaken\setup.exe

Spectacular graphics and sound make this playable demo a major action treat. The demo includes two single-player levels with one deathmatch level that will support up to four players over an IPX, TCP/IP, modem, or serial connection.

Requirements: Pentium-133, 16 MB RAM, SVGA w/ 1MB, 3D card, soundboard, Win95



Addiction Pinball

Team 17

Pinball

\games\addict\run.bat

A tasty pinball game which claims to simulate proper shadows and reflections, as well as accurate physics and collisions. From what we have seen, the results appear promising, as the balls move smoothly and realistically. The pinball table provided

comes complete with the characters from Worms. The goal in the demo is to beat the clock and play through the Wild West mode.

Requirements: Pentium-133, 16 MB RAM, SVGA w/ 1MB, soundboard, Win95

Launch Ball Return
Left Flipper Left Shift
Right Flipper Right Shift
Nudge Left Left Alt
Nudge Right Right Alt
Nudge Up Space

Balls Of Steel

GT Interactive

Pinball

\games

bosdemo

boss11.exe

GT Interactive's new pinball action game is sure to make you a pinball wizard with a little help from Duke Nukem and friends. Balls of Steel delivers all the authentic gravitational pyrotechnics of real pinball. This demo lets you play one table out of the five available in the full version and limits you to one tournament mode.

Requirements: Pentium-133, 16 MB RAM, SVGA w/ 1MB, soundboard, Win95

Heavy Gear [3D version]

Activision

Robot Action

\games\hvygear\hgdemo.exe

Activision's latest mech sim picks up where the series left off with smaller and faster Gears (mechanized robots of war). The demo lets you play two full missions.

You must have at least a Pentium 166 and a 3Dfx or Rendition accelerator card (3Dfx Reference drivers version 2.13 and up, Diamond Monster drivers version 1.09 and up, Orchid Righteous drivers version 3.0 and up, and Rendition Reference drivers version 2.1 Beta 2 and up) to play this demo.

Requirements: Pentium-133, 16 MB RAM, SVGA w/ 1MB, mouse, soundboard, Win95

Descent Freespace

Interplay

Action

\games\descent\fsdemo10.exe

Based on the universe created for the Descent series. This excellent shooter includes four missions and lets you play with up to 12 players via IPX or TCP/IP network. You can grab a microphone and talk to other players live during the action as well as track your statistics, rank, and medals against players from all over the world on the free Internet Tracker!

Requirements: Pentium-133, 16 MB RAM, SVGA w/ 1MB, soundboard, Win95





X-COM: Interceptor

Microprose

Strategy

\games\xcom3\setup.exe

X-COM: Interceptor puts you behind the controls of a sleek spacecraft designed with only one function in mind: to destroy aliens.

The demo provides an introduction to the gameplay and also for those that might not have checked out this series yet.

Requirements: Pentium-166, 16 MB RAM, direct X, Win 95
See the Read Me for controls

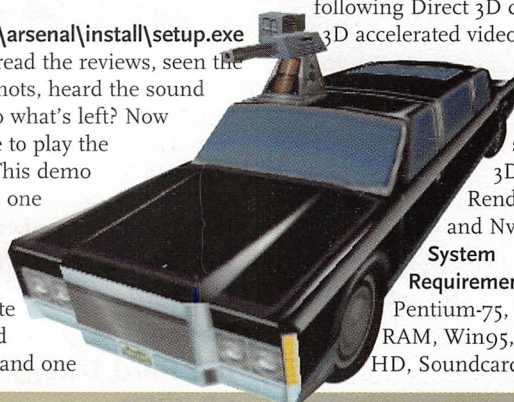
Interstate '76 Arsenal

Activision

Action

\games\arsenal\install\setup.exe

You've read the reviews, seen the screenshots, heard the sound track, so what's left? Now it's time to play the game. This demo features one mission from the new Interstate '76 Gold Edition and one



mission from the Interstate '76 Nitro Pack. The Interstate '76 Arsenal Demo is a 3D accelerated demo only. It requires one of the following Direct 3D compatible 3D accelerated video card properly installed on your system:

3Dfx, Rendition, ATI and Nvidia.

System

Requirements:

Pentium-75, 32 MB RAM, Win95, 40 MB HD, Soundcard, Win95

Jedi Knight: Mysteries of the Sith

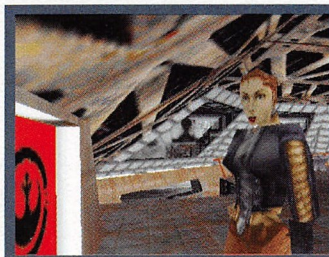
Lucasarts

3D Action

\games\mots-b\sithdemo.exe

This add-on for LucasArts' excellent Jedi Knight takes place five years after Kyle Katarn's victory over Jerec. Katarn has discovered a mysterious Sith temple that holds mysterious forces. Mara Jade, a smuggler and Jedi in training, has joined Kyle on his quest. The game engine has been tweaked with coloured lighting, improved multi-player options, and more.

Requirements: Pentium-133, 16 MB RAM, SVGA: w/ 1MB, mouse, soundboard, Win95



QUEST FOR GLORY V

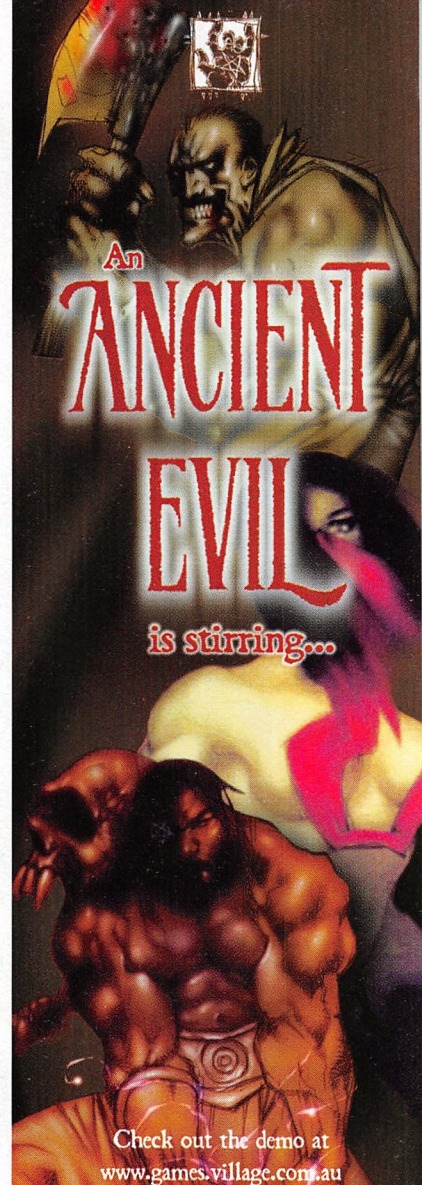
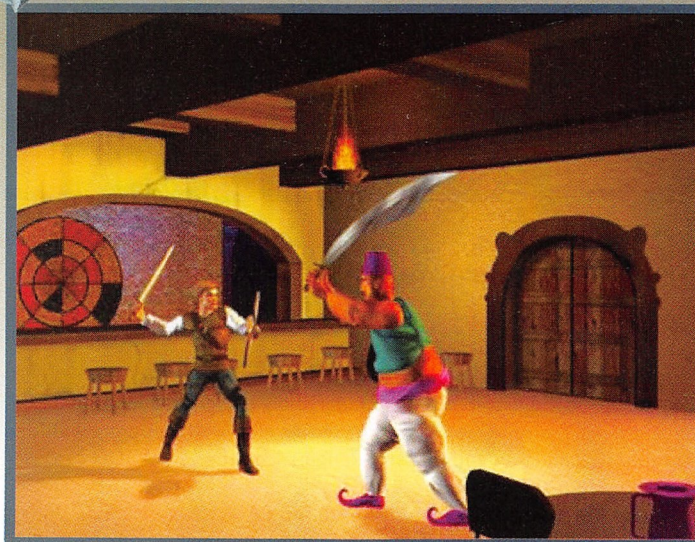
Sierra

Adventure

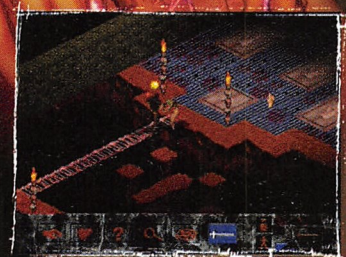
\games\qfg5demo\setup.exe

The latest in the popular Quest For Glory series. You're the hero needed to do battle with the evil forces once again. Sound familiar? See for yourself. This demo lets you sample the scenery as well as practice your fighting skills in the arena.

System Requirements: Pentium-75, 16 MB RAM, 1MB, mouse, sound board, Win95



Check out the demo at
www.games.village.com.au

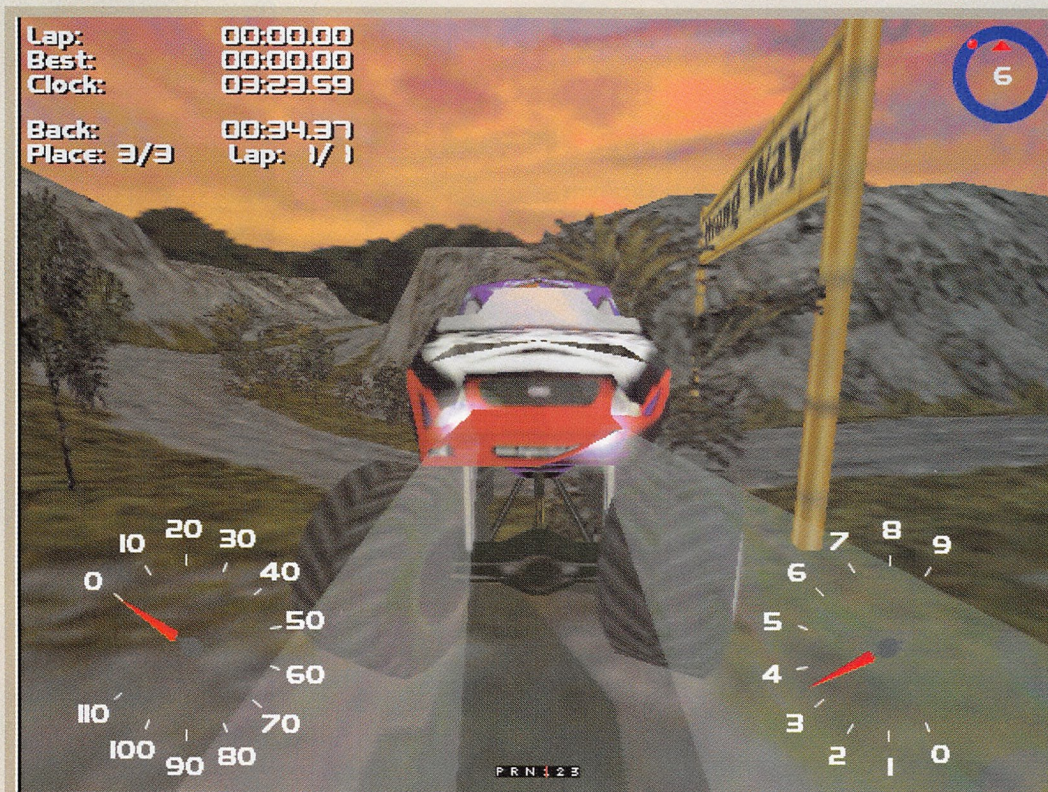


...can you destroy the evil
before it is too late?



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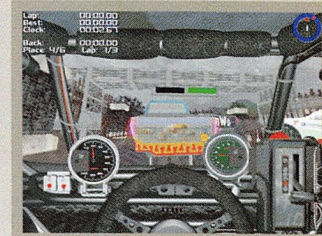
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Microsoft Driving

`\games\monster\monster.exe`
The Monster Truck Madness 2 trial version includes four monster trucks: Executioner, Firestone Wilderness, Snake Bite and Stinger. Burn rubber on Farm Road 29, a circuit track. This trial version will allow players to race against one another, for free, on the Internet Gaming Zone.

System Requirements: Pentium-75, 16 MB RAM, SVGA w/ 1MB, mouse, sound board, Win95



MONSTER TRUCK MADNESS 2

KKnD 2

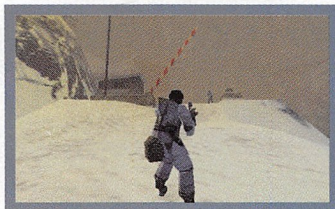
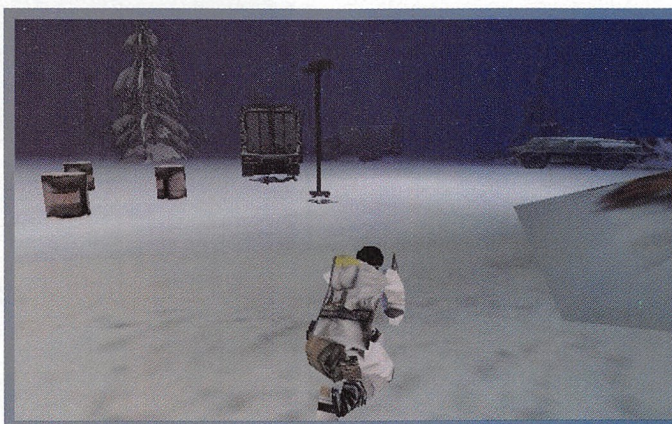
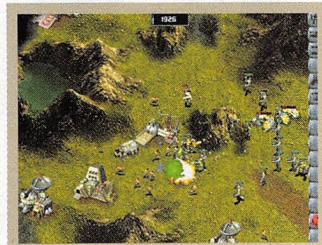
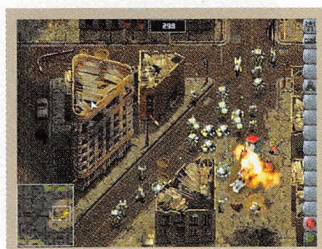
Melbourne House

Strategy

`\games\kknkd\kros\setup.exe`

Robust SVGA graphics and edge-of-the-seat gameplay characterize this enhancement of Beam Software's popular real-time strategy game KKnD. The demo gives you a brief taste of the features offered in the full release.

System Requirements: Pentium-75, 16 MB RAM, SVGA w/ 1MB, mouse, sound card, Win95



Spec Ops

Zombie
Action

`\games\specops\so_demo.exe`

Spec Ops is the first in a series of incredibly realistic, action-oriented, real-time 3D third-person games based on elite warfare units - with the emphasis on action and realism. Rangers lead the way. A 3Dfx card is required to play this demo.

System Requirements: Pentium-166, 16 MB RAM, 3-D accelerator, Win 95

PATCHES

\patches

This month's batch of patches include the latest for 3Dfx cards as well as fixes for Dark Reign, Myth and Nascar 2.

The 3Dfx patches are for:

Archimedean Dynasty
Carmageddon

Descent 2

Die Hard Trilogy

EF 2000

GL Quake

G Police

Interstate 76

Jet Fighter 3

MDK

Mech Warrior 2

Outlaws

Shadow Warrior

Star Fighter

Swiv 3D

Tomb Raider

Toshinden

Uprising

Xwing Vs Tie Fighter

Utilities

Contact Coordinator

\utils\contact\coco12.exe

Contact Coordinator is a very versatile contact manager with a strong Internet orientation. It helps you take control of your communications by organizing all your contact information in one convenient place. Rather than dealing with separate lists of names and addresses in your E-mail, Fax, Web browser, and address book programs, you can now store all of this information in one program.

File Mag-Net

\utils\filemag\fmagnet.exe

A powerful file search tool that filters all content from a web page and lists only the files that were used or referenced. It then lets the user download all the files at once (like the newsgroups), that the web browsers don't support.

Hippie 97

\utils\hippie\hip97_21.exe

One of the best HTML editor's around. It shows you a realtime view of what the HTML file you're working on looks like, autoupdating with any changes you make! It also has configurable toolbars, upload capabilities, the ability to open an online URL and edit the page, and much more. You need Internet Explorer 3.01 or better for the realtime viewer.

Monthly Bill Manager 98

\utils\mbm\mbm98.exe

Helps keep track of all of your Bills, Credit Cards, Loans, Savings Account, and Check-Book information on a monthly basis. Very exciting stuff, this.

Netmedic

\utils\netmedic\nm.exe

Internet performance measurement tool. It displays your person-

al path from your PC to your modem or Intranet and so on. It's also great for finding out if there are internet traffic problems or if certain servers are down.

Net Nanny

\utils\netnanny\45eval45.exe

It's late at night and your kids are hacking away on your PC. No need to worry though, because this program will allow you to monitor, screen and block access to anything running on your PC, online or off. Keeps them away from "naughty" or illegal sites.

Norton Uninstall Deluxe

\utils\nortons\nud.exe

A safe way to make changes on any Windows 95 or Windows NT 4.0 system, including both removing and adding programs and files. Norton Uninstall Deluxe provides program, file and disk management tools that allow you to safely try new programs, recapture disk space and cleanup your hard drive(s).

Paint Shop Pro 4.14

\utils\psp414\psp414.exe

Paint Shop Pro is the only photo retouching, painting, image format conversion and screen capturing program you will ever need. Includes powerful features such as painting, photo retouching, built in special effects, image enhancement and editing tools.

Ready To Print

\utils\rtp\rtp0305.exe

Useful program which lets you print calendars, address books and expense forms with great ease. Great for creating a professional and customized organizer.

Stardust Screen Saver

\utils\screen\sst2ote.exe

Highly acclaimed screen saver creation software which allows you to create professional high-quality redistributable screen saver applications — without any programming.

Ulead PhotoImpact 4

\utils\photo\up14tria.exe

Graphics program which delivers professional quality image editing and spectacular effects with ease and precision. This fully functional version is yours to explore for 30 days.

Winzip 6.3

\utils\winzip63\winzip95.exe

Compression program which features built-in ZIP & UNZIP spanning and MIME, UUencode, BinHex, TAR, gzip support. Includes tight integration from the Win95 shell such as drag and drop TO or FROM the Explorer or ZIP and UNZIP without leaving the Explorer.

DRIVERS

\drivers\3dfx

\drivers\pvr

This month's patch section contains all the latest 3Dfx and PowerVR video drivers. These drivers are updates for the following cards -

- Diamond Monster 3D
- Canopus Pure 3D
- Orchid Righteous 3D
- VideoLogic
- Apocalypse 5D Sonic
- VideoLogic
- Apocalypse 3D
- Matrox M3D

The sequel to the
1994
Arcade
game of
the year



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SIDELINES

America: highest proportion of lawyers in the world

We reported on the possible Starcraft lawsuit last month, and though Blizzard have yet to be actually served with the suit they have admitted that they were using 'snooping' software in an effort to identify users that were using pirated software. The company has apologised to customers and said that the information gathered will not be saved in their databases. In an interesting turn of events, the attorney filing the suit, Donald P. Driscoll has come under some close attention from the gaming community, and many are finding him wanting. At issue is his motivation for the suit, as he is not filing it on behalf of gamers, but instead on behalf of a company part owned by his mother, 'Intervention Inc'. Driscoll claims that he is fighting for consumer's rights, though others have been quick to point out that Driscoll may be influenced by the possible financial incentives of taking on large, publicity-shy companies, and the publicity he gains from the prominent lawsuits.

Activision - making lots of money

Buoyed by a strong lineup of games released over the Christmas period last year which included Quake 2, Zork: Grand Inquisitor, and Heavy Gear, Activision have posted their financial results for the 3rd quarter of the 1997/98 fiscal year. Anyone who still thinks that computer games aren't big business need only look at these figures to realise just how wrong they are. For the three months up to the 31st of December 1997, Activision reported revenues of \$US122,141,000. Despite this huge figure, net income for the quarter was only \$US9,278,000 - a paltry 9 million US dollars.

EA: making even more

Electronic Arts, who own possibly the world's most annoying website (takes an age to load, has useless intro screens, continually updates itself with useless information) have topped Activision's revenues - and in fact, every other entertainment software company in the world. For the 1997 calendar year, EA posted revenues of an astounding \$US860 million, an increase of 59% over last year. This puts them ahead of such giants as Nintendo, Sony, GT Interactive, Cadant Software (owners of Sierra), and even Microsoft Corporation. Some more huge numbers; sales for home entertainment software topped 13 billion US dollars worldwide in 1997, and are expected to grow by at least 30% next year according to market research firm Access Media International. We are gamers, hear us roar!

Wrong Numbers

In our Motherboard Benchtest in issue 25, some of the prices were incorrect. We'd just like to take this opportunity to blame the supplier, who were a little confused about the pricing of their own product range. Correct prices are below:

AX6LC: RRP\$249

AX6B: RRP\$349

These boards are from Servex Australia Tel: (02)98704868, Fax: (02)98701931.

Diamond acquires Micronics / Orchid

Micronics Computers, manufacturers of the Orchid Righteous 3Dfx card as well as a range of motherboards, have been acquired by Diamond Multimedia Systems for around US\$ 31.6 million. Micronics have been in trouble lately, ever since Intel joined the motherboard market in earnest, providing moderate range boards at a cheap price. Though Micronics Orchid Righteous 3Dfx cards did prove to be popular with consumers, their main source of revenue was through their motherboards, and so Micronics had been struggling financially of late.

Diamond will continue to market and promote Orchid Righteous video cards, includ-

ing the new Orchid Righteous 2 cards

(based on the Voodoo 2) as well as their 'Monster 2' Voodoo2 based cards, though industry analysts have cited the main reason for Diamond's acquisition as being their desire to produce a more diverse range of hardware for PCs. Diamond are also expected to be investigating the possibility of integrating many proprietary products into single entities, which many see as being the next

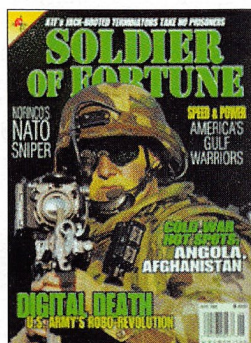


direction for peripheral component manufacturers to take. With this latest acquisition, Diamond now produce 2D and 3D graphics cards, motherboards, sound cards, modems, and SCSI adapters, and could conceivably create motherboards and peripheral devices which combine many of these products rather than selling each separately.

Activision to publish 'Soldier of Fortune' game

In what is seen by many both within and outside the games industry to be a disturbing trend, Activision and GT Interactive have recently signed deals to produce some very violent and realistic games.

Soldier of Fortune magazine, an American publication designed with the 'casual warrior' in mind as well as those within the armed forces and mercenaries, has given the long term rights to Activision to produce games across all platforms. Raven Software (developers of Heretic) are set to develop the first title which will be a 3D action shooter that utilises the Quake 2 engine. Robert Kotick, chairman and CEO of Activision has commented that he feels the Soldier of Fortune license will enable Activision to "bring the appeal of first-person action shooters to broader audiences" - a claim which many would have



trouble believing. Kotick, however, was positively effusive in his support for the as yet unnamed game. "This game is as close as players can get to experiencing the dangers and thrills of authentic mercenary combat without having to ingest bad rations, suffer in sweltering heat, and visit some frightening third world country", he said. Indications are that he was completely serious.

GT Interactive are also serious about this new and disturbing trend towards realism (and, some would say, retro redneck xenophobia), and have a deal to publish a game from a development company called 'Team TNT'. The game is called 'Nam', and as the name suggests, will seek to authentically recreate the 'military mayhem' of the American Soldiers in Vietnam, with

authentic weapons like the M-16 Assault rifle, M-60 machine gun, and the M-72 LAAW rocket. Former US Marine Sergeant Dan Snyder, who created the famous 'Marine Doom' conversion is helping out Team TNT with the development of the game, and is expected to contribute to a realistic jungle, village, and tunnel environment. Based on the 3D Realms Build engine, GT are saying that Nam will give you the "ambience of war that is almost too real to believe".

It seems likely, however, that the OFLC would be asking both GT and Activision representatives in Australia to 'please explain' should they attempt to release the title locally.



MMX2 KATMAI

Intel's Gaming CPU

In the coming months, select developers will receive beta samples of Intel's forthcoming Katmai processor. Intel will also be providing developers with tools that will aid in the development of applications for these new instructions.

Unlike the MMX debacle, where some developers had to hand-code MMX instructions using assembler op-codes (great fun!), Intel have got it right this time and have compilers ready to go with the MMX2 code.

There are actually 70 new instructions, which are not unlike AMD's K6-2 '3DNOW!' instructions, except for the fact that AMD has only 21 new instructions. Intel's additional instructions are most likely for other multimedia processing, like video decompression/compression. AMD's instructions are there for the purpose of accelerating 3D graphics. Does this mean 3DNOW! will beat MMX2 for 3D geometry processing? Only time will tell.

Intel's MMX2 will include 3D geometry processing instructions which will be more important as 3D cards reach for the skies in performance. 3D graphic accelerators - the Voodoo 2 being a prime example - are actually waiting for information from the processor. The current mass-market CPUs like the Pentium II, and especially the K6, have very weak floating point geometry processing power. Their FPU is not slow by any means, but currently it can't keep up with the speed the 3D accelerators require.

To fix this very annoying issue, Intel will release the Katmai CPU. Initially at speeds of 450MHz with faster versions to follow, the Katmai will incorporate Intel's answer to the 3D-bottleneck problem, which has been thus far code-

named MMX2. MMX2 will be what MMX should have been, including instructions that will actually be useful for multimedia processing. Hopefully the Katmai should be able to max out a Voodoo 2 based system.

Further down the line Intel are expected to release a form of the Katmai for their Slot-M architecture that includes two Katmai's in the same SEC cartridge. The Slot-M will be what



the much talked about P7 Merced CPU will slot into. The Merced is still expected on the shelves sometime in the 2nd half of 1999. By that time 3D graphics accelerators will have had to incorporate their own geometry engines to alleviate the need to rely on the CPU to give it data.

More in 3D Technews p113

The Game At The End Of Time

The biggest buzz in the U.S. has been The Wheel Of Time, the mix of real-time strategy, action, and role-playing based on the superb fantasy novels from Robert Jordan. This one'll be using the Unreal game engine, which by now you've undoubtedly been able to evaluate. Developer Legend Entertainment has a deal for GT Interactive to put its mighty marketing and distribution behind this one, which is slated to hit stores sometime next year. Gameplay should be deep in The Wheel Of Time; you'll be handling spells, invading enemy strongholds while protecting your own holdings, and seeking seals that'll stop ultimate evil from gaining a foothold in the world. **DSJ**



Bandits steal \$16 million worth from Microsoft

While most would think of Software piracy in terms of illegally copying games and applications and then distributing them across the internet, 'pirates' with a more old school flavour have recently taken a different tack against Microsoft.

The production facility that the Washington based software giant maintains in Scotland was recently 'held up' by thieves who got away with an estimated \$US16 million worth of Microsoft products and certificates of authenticity. The bandits bound and gagged three Microsoft employees and threatened them with



guns whilst they made off with 100,000 CD-ROMs, 200,000 Certificates Of Authenticity and various pieces of computer equip-

ment.

Microsoft does have a record of the numbers on the Certificates Of Authenticity and have alerted vendors and resellers as to what to look out for. However, most of the stolen software is expected to reappear on the black market through dodgy mail order companies offering discounted software, particularly in the piracy stricken Asian region - caveat emptor!

SIDELINES

Flight Sim developers, check your six!

Despite a drought lasting over three years, flight simulations are supposedly on the comeback trail. More realistic controls, and more realistic terrain largely thanks to the advent of 3D accelerators, was supposed to herald the new age of flight sims. However, the expectations have yet to be realised in many ways, and it's not just the flight sim fans that are becoming frustrated. Joe Enzminger, a former Warbirds programmer, and Brent Oster of Longbow II 3D fame have left their respective companies to start up their own development house called 'Check Six Studios'. "Check Six Studios was conceived because we felt the flight simulation market has reached a plateau...very few of them do justice to the experience of flying an airplane", said Joe Enzminger.

Lycos launches game site

While most people use internet search engines to search for internet content, Lycos are betting that at least some of the visitors to their web page would like to take a break and play some games. In partnership with Go2Net, users will be able to play games like Chess, Checkers, Hearts, Spades and the like at <http://playsite.lycos.com>. It's not quite as ambitious as Ultima Online, but there will be rankings and tournaments for those interested.

What software pirates dream about #23: DVD-RAM

Despite the technological advances offered, DVD-ROM has yet to make a significant impact in the software entertainment sector, partly because of the ongoing dispute about international 'stamping' of DVD movies. However, DVD-RAM is touted as being the next technological leap because as the name suggests, the disks will be rewritable. With storage capacities of up to 5.2GB and compatibility for DVD-ROM, CD-Audio, Video CD, PhotoCD, CD-ROM, CD-R, and more, DVD-RAM would certainly seem to be the way of the future. Creative Pacific, as is usually the case, will be one of the first to release DVD-RAM units in our region (creatively named the 'Creative DVD-RAM'), though details on pricing and availability are not yet available.

Shigeru Miyamoto receives 'Hall Of Fame' award

The Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences (AIAS) announced that the inaugural 'Hall Of Fame' award went to Shigeru Miyamoto, creator of some of the most recognisable video game characters in the world, and responsible for such fantastic games as Mario 64, Donkey Kong, Yoshi's Story and a plethora of others. Jim Charne, president of AIAS said that "throughout his career Mr Miyamoto has consistently created wonderful worlds filled with memorable characters...it is not an understatement [sic] to say that Mr Miyamoto's games set the standard for the video game playing experience". Hear hear!

SUN SUES MICROSOFT, AGAIN

Attempts to delay shipment of Window's '98

Sun Microsystems Inc, creators and proliferators of 'Java' technology, had previously entered into a 'technology license and distribution agreement' with Microsoft back in March 1996 for Microsoft to distribute Java as a part of the Windows OS, and more particularly with their forthcoming browser (at the time), Internet Explorer 3.x (IE3).

However, it didn't take long for the acrimony between Sun and Microsoft to surface, with Sun filing a law suit alleging, amongst other things, that Microsoft had "corrupted" Java for use with IE3 and was seeking to create their own version of Java in such a way that it required a Microsoft OS for use.

The primary benefit of Java, according to Sun, was that it would operate independently of the OS it was running upon, which means that a program created with Java on a Microsoft Windows machine would work equally as well on another plat-

form such as Linux (or any other OS). The suit has been dragging on for well over a year now, and though Sun did have a minor victory granting them a preliminary injunction, the battle is set to drag on for a long time yet.

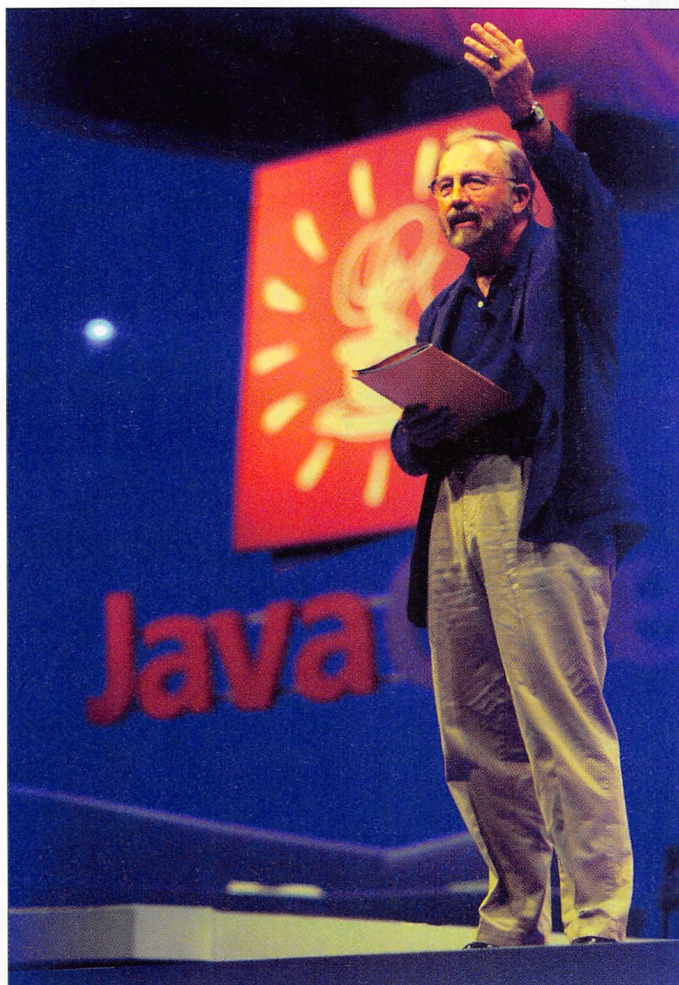
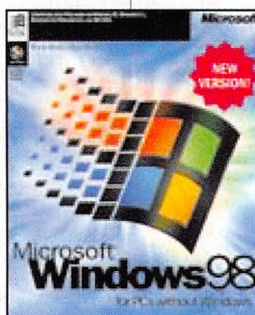
Sun have recently filed another lawsuit, attempting through the courts to make Microsoft alter the current implementation of the Java Virtual Machine that

is currently on the Windows '98 CD, or for Microsoft to remove the "Java Compatible" trademark from IE4 and the Software Developers Kit for Java 2.0 (SDKJ 2.0).

Microsoft have responded to the allegations by saying

that the original agreement between Sun and Microsoft allowed them to make the changes, and that Sun were just jumping on the bandwagon of the anti-trust law suits pending from the US states and Government.

Sun & Java: prescient revolutionaries or hopeless optimists?

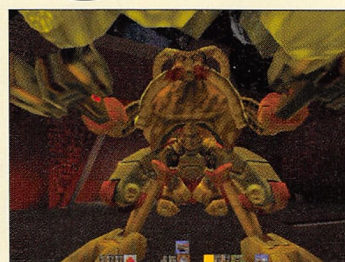


CGDA votes on 1997's best games

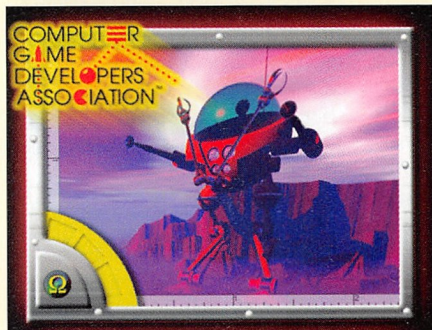
The Computer Games Developer's Association, which is, surprisingly enough, comprised of mostly game developers, voted on what they consider to be the best games of last year. Though there are many awards throughout the games industry

from various entities, the CGDA awards are held in high regard by the developers because it is they themselves that vote for their peers, much like the 'players' player award' in many

football codes. It doesn't seem likely that GT Interactive's 'Deer Hunter' game will be picking up many awards next year, because apparently many of the developers that attended were rather scathing in their criticism of the 'game'.



Developers choice: Age of Empires (Best Game) & Quake II (numerous awards)



Awards of note were;
Best use of graphics: Quake II
Best soundtrack: Blade Runner
Coollest new hardware: Voodoo 2
Best online game: Quake II
Best action game: Quake II
Best adventure or RPG game: Final Fantasy VII

Best flight sim: Longbow 2
Best strategy/war game: Myth: The Fallen Lords
Best sports game: Need For Speed 2
Annual achievement award: Bruce Shelley and Rick Goodman for AOE
Best game: Age of Empires

A Blizzard of Suits

Must be something about the courtroom that's attracted Blizzard Entertainment lately—can we expect Lawcraft to follow Diablo II? Anyway, they're trying to suppress the release of Micro Star's Stellar Forces add-on for Starcraft, claiming that the release violates

the license restriction on using the Starcraft map editor (you may remember Micro Star from a similar legal set-to over a Duke Nukem 3D level pack). So far, Blizzard hasn't gotten an injunction to stop the release, so if you see it on your local store shelves, snap it up pronto. **DSJ**



TOP TEN GAMES

Rank	Title	Developer / Distributor
TW	LW	
1	1	STARCRRAFT BLIZZARD / WOLF
2	3	STARSHIP TITANIC SIMON & SCHUSTER / HILAD CORP.
3	5	BATTLEZONE ACTIVISION / ACTIVISION
4	7	CROC FOX / EA
5	2	QUAKE II ID SOFTWARE / ROADSHOW
6	4	STAR WARS REBELLION LUCASARTS / METRO GAMES
7	17	AGE OF EMPIRES MICROSOFT / VARIOUS
8	9	F15 JANES / ELECTRONIC ARTS
9	16	DARK REIGN ACTIVISION / ACTIVISION
10	10	M1 TANK PLATOON MICROPROSE / DIGITAL LEISURE

Week ending 17th May

The ACER best selling charts are carefully compiled from a sample panel of retailers selected across Australia including mass merchants, department stores, specialty software stores and independent outlets. Retailers surveyed include Myer Grace Bros, David Jones and John Martins, K Mart, Target, Big W, World 4 Kids, Harvey Norman Computer Super stores, Blockbuster, Brashes, Video Games Heaven and Games Wizards ©1997

Charts supplied by Australian Computer Entertainment Review

ACER

Voodoo 2 needs 1GHz CPU

Some of you may have already picked up on this, but we felt it was important enough to mention again. After our interview with Videologic's Trevor Wing (PCPP #25), we considered a very interesting comment that he made.

The statement: "The real fact of the matter is that with a 333Mhz PII we are unlikely to see much more than 1M polygons/sec generated on the CPU".

With a Voodoo 2 capable of filling, texturing, anti-aliasing and generally making prettier over 3 million polygons per second, simple math says that it's going to take a 999Mhz Pentium (or the Gigahertz chip) to see 2nd generation 3D cores maxed-out. Whether advanced floating point abilities within the Katmai are going to help this is still to be seen, but it looks like processor dependence may be making a most unwelcome return.

NewsWire US



Don St John

Sometimes, you've just got to wonder if game companies have the best interests of gamers at heart. It sure seems like they're having trouble keeping their eyes on the ball.

Now, I'm not talking about egofests like the recent Internet dustup between id Software and Shiny Entertainment, who each put out some public e-mail arguing that they're God's #1 Gift to 3D action coding. Hey, when you can offer the likes of Quake II and MDK to a parched, dusty gaming world, go ahead and fight; at least you're taking care of business first. Me, I think you can share #1, at least until the next cool 15-year-old C++ geek comes out of the garage and blows you both away.

No, I'm thinking of real dumb stuff, like Blizzard getting popped with a lawsuit. Seems they allegedly snagged info out of the Windows registries of some people playing Starcraft online over Battle.Net. Bad move, of course. Naturally, they've stopped, they're very very sorry, and they really, truly promise never to do it again. Didn't they notice when Microsoft (the company, not its' games division) got raked over the coals last year for planning the same thing? Look, just do what everybody else does—put a survey on your Website for people who like your game. You'll get tons more info on your audience that way.

Then again, Blizzard should be grateful to have an audience willing to wait for Starcraft to finally come out. (Hallelujah!) I'm writing this just before E3, the game industry's super-huge product-fest, and I'm wondering how many games I'll have to see for the second year running. For instance, I just got a release across my desk announcing that Gathering Of Developers (aka The Gathering—at least they're not so ego-driven that they're using G.O.D....yet) has the rights to Max Payne, a cop-based 3D shooter. It just so happens that this one was being shown at last year's E3, and now we won't see it until spring 1999. And G.o.d. knows, that's not the only offender—did I just hear someone mention Daikatana?

C'mon, guys, talk about these things when they're ready. Gamers shouldn't let themselves be jerked around by this sort of stuff. Just ignore it: Show the games when they're ready, and spare us from the ones we'll really have to wait for. Speaking of which, I'll check in after E3 with the latest U.S. scoop.

Official: UK is dull and boring

Notably absent from our news pages this month is our UK correspondent Steve Boxer's report. All fired up for E3, Steve headed off to Atlanta a couple of weeks ahead of schedule to... prepare. Thanks to Steve's tireless ground work, when Ben arrives on the morning the show starts, will know exactly where the best steak is to be had. That, and according to Steve before he left, "there's bugger all happening here, everyone's holding back for E3." Steve returns next month.

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The Platinum Series are the top-of-the-range in Sony's brand new series of Trinitron monitors. PC PowerPlay readers wouldn't settle for anything less, so thanks to the (frankly) amazing generosity of Sony Australia, we're giving away their Rolls Royce monitor.

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THE NEW SOUND

PCI Sound Cards

The day of the ISA based SB16 are numbered. PCI Bus allows more features and less CPU load

Once upon a time, when 386s ruled the land and 486s were just starting to make an impression, sound-cards were the 'Multimedia' of the day. Creative Labs, with their Sound Blaster range, ruled the world.

It was a time of DOS games when compatibility meant market acceptance, and market acceptance meant survival.

How things have changed since then though. Now in the late 90s multi-tasking, multi-user operating systems instead rule the land, and standardisation, through DirectX, means a greater variety of sound cards is not only possible, but with no compatibility issues, also totally feasible.

The Magic of PCI Cards

Although this is something we've discussed before, it's worth reiterating that the new breed of PCI sound card is an exceptional bonus to the gamers' PC. When an ISA sound card is replaced with a PCI card, game performance and even frame rate can be increased by a considerable margin.

The reason this occurs is because your PC is actually only as fast as the slowest component. In the case of the sound card a performance hit is taken on the processor as it sends the many sounds of a game from RAM to the actual card for processing.

As an ISA bus is considerably slower than a PCI bus, when sending information to an ISA sound card your whole machine has to wait for the operation to complete. With PCI being a much faster means of transferring data, the idle time of your machine for sound operations is dramatically reduced resulting ultimately in better performance.

Yamaha Waveforce XG

SPECIFICATIONS

Midi Wavetable Memory Size : 2 Mb
Polyphony : 64 instruments or simultaneous notes
Effects : Reverb, Chorus, Variation Echo
Full Duplex : Yes
Sample Rate : 5Hz - 48KHz
Front and Rear speaker support: No
RRP : \$TBA

Yamaha are renowned the world over for their high quality range of hi-fi equipment, speakers and keyboards. It's no surprise then, that the XG sound card is also of an exceptional standard.

One of the nicest features about this card is that it isn't trying to be too many things. It doesn't have gimmicky 3D sound support that muffles sound and is virtually useless. Instead, it offers exceptional sound quality with a crispness and clarity that is something to behold.

Whether playing a CD, MP3 or wave file, this card outputs hiss and distortion free sound.

Proof of this card's excellent sound quality can actually hit you rather unexpectedly. When listening to a familiar music CD, you're suddenly able to hear sounds you've never heard before.

Midi support is also very good. It doesn't feature downloadable sound font tables such as the AWE32/64, but its 676 dif-

ferent instruments along with 21 separate drum kits are all of an above average standard.

Although it doesn't offer 4 speaker surround such as the Diamond Monster Sound, the absolutely exceptional quality of the sound that's output from this silicon wonder makes it a perfect choice for a 2 speaker gaming solution.

Diamond Sonic Impact

SPECIFICATIONS

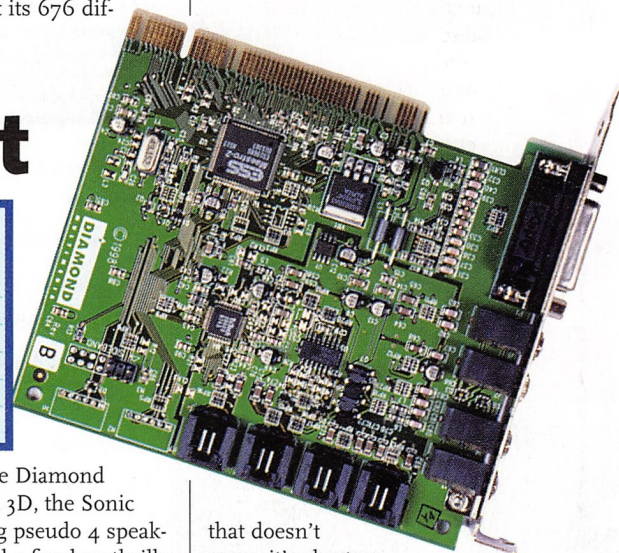
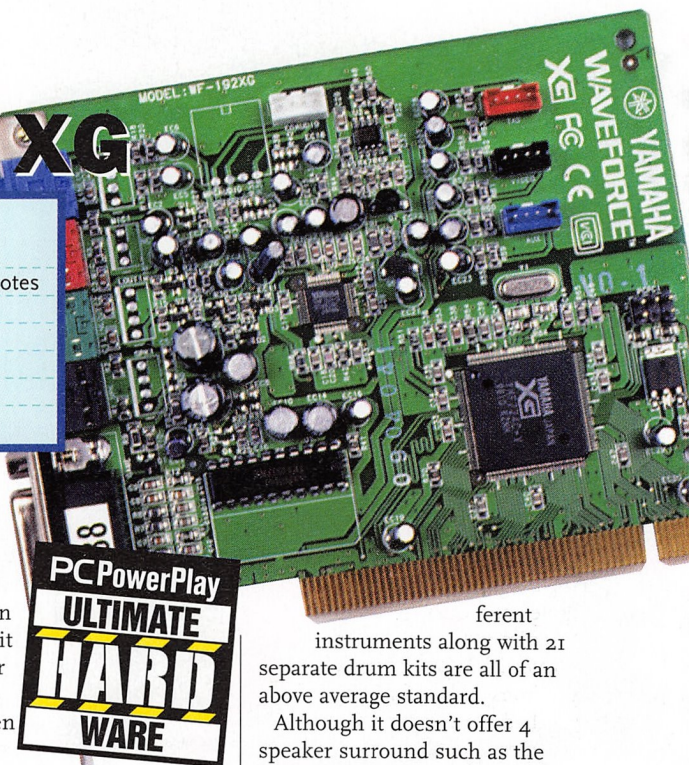
Midi Polyphony : 64 instruments or simultaneous notes
Effects : Reverb, Chorus, 3D positional, Full Duplex
Full Duplex : Yes
Sample Rate : 5Hz - 48KHz
Front and Rear speaker support : Yes, but not true surround
RRP : \$119

Diamond may be better known for their range of video cards, or more recently, their 3Dfx offerings, but in fact are becoming one of the world's largest multimedia forces. Previously proving their worth on the high end sound

frontier with the Diamond Monster Sound 3D, the Sonic Impact, offering pseudo 4 speaker surround and a few less thrills than its bigger brother could become a popular choice.

The S70 is Diamond's offering to the lower ended market but

that doesn't mean it's short on functionality. Offering a quite comprehensive sound solution its real time wave effects include Reverb, Chorus, Bass, Treble and

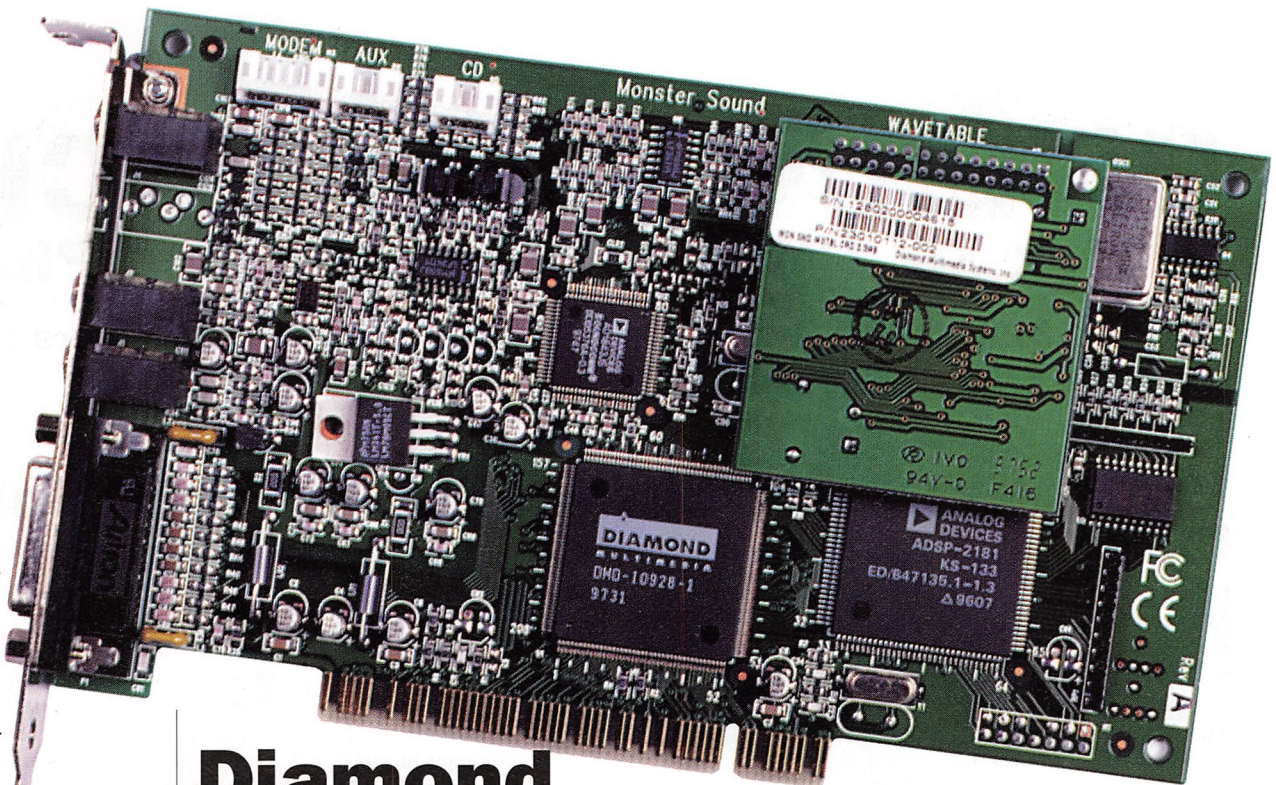


3D sound effects.

Another interesting factor is that the S70 has support for 4 speakers. The card doesn't actually differentiate between front and rear speakers as the MS3D does, but is still a good starting point for a 4 speaker solution. A neat trick to emulate surround sound is to turn up the bass in the rear speakers and reduce the bass in the front speakers. This effect is quite substantial.

Sonically, the S70 isn't the greatest. The general audio output from the card has a slightly muffled sound to it and at high volumes there is a slight hiss. CD's, although sounding good, are inferior and in no-way comparable to the quality of the Yamaha. Midi sounds are again acceptable, but without downloadable sound fonts are far too limited.

Ultimately, for \$119 the S70 is a good sound card, particularly as an affordable 4 speaker solution. Add to that the real time wave manipulation effects and you get a lot of bang for your buck.



Diamond Monster Sound MX80

SPECIFICATIONS

Midi Polyphony: 64 instruments or simultaneous notes.

Effects: Aural 3D positional audio.

Full Duplex: Yes

Sample Rate: 5Hz - 48Khz

Front and Rear speaker support: No

RRP: \$149

The Diamond Monster Sound MX80 is an interesting entry into Diamond's sound card range. This is Diamond's mid-range card (that is to say, sitting between the Monster Sound 3D and the Sonic Impact).

The conundrum is that as a mid range card its sound quality is definitely better than the Sonic Impact, yet offers less features in terms of digital effects and 3D sound emulation.

Essentially, the MX80 is a

Monster Sound 3D without 4 speaker surround support. The MX80 only has one output for 2 speakers and

unlike the lower end Sonic Impact, it doesn't even offer pretend surround sound in the form of a little built-in splitter.

Sonically, the MX80 sounds good and is identical to the Monster Sound 3D in 2 speaker mode. The quality isn't as good as the Yamaha though, which as an Monster Sound 3D owner is rather disappointing. If Yamaha release a 4 speaker version of their sound card, I'll be the first buyer.

Midi sounds for the MX80 are functional and of average quality.

Perhaps I'm too spoiled, but having owned an AWE32 for many years with 8Mb of memory, downloadable sound fonts mean that instrument quality and variety are simply amazing. None of the sound cards tested offered downloadable midi sounds and therefore sadly pale when compared to a card 4 years older.

Conclusion

Depending of course on price, the Yamaha is a preferable buy to the MX80. Even though this is essentially a Monster Sound 3D without rear speaker support, you're better off either getting an original Monster Sound 3D, or if you only need 2 speaker support, the Yamaha.

Jere Lawrence

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INTERACT JOYSTICKS

Vortex 3D, Ultraracer, Flight Force Plus

We like them weird, when weird works. 3 new controllers from InterAct break the gimmick barrier.

Vortex 3D

RRP \$99.95

For generations, joystick engineers have endeavoured to build a better stick. Some succeed, others fail. The Vortex 3D deserves to be in the former category, for some deep and meaningful thought has gone into its design.

Now, this is not an all-in-one solution - you'll still be needing a proper joystick, but if you don't yet have a control pad or steering wheel because you can't justify the cost for only occasional gaming, then the Vortex is for you.

Sitting on its detachable base, the Vortex's free-floating handset wobbles in all directions. It provides pitch and roll control, plus it twists for full yaw control. That makes it an interesting alternative for 1st-person action games. While we tried to love the SpaceOrb, it's a dud. This though, is far more practical and intuitive. The pad features 6 buttons and a D-pad, as well as 2 shoulder buttons and a separate throttle control. The control pad separates from the base for conventional pad-gaming, or keep it in place for action gaming or in its surprisingly effective steering wheel mode. The yaw movement is full-ranged and smooth and the throttle is the same. When compared to a proper \$300+ steering wheel this is an excellent alternative.

We tested the Vortex with Forsaken and it worked a treat. This sort of game is exactly right for this controller, with its added functions a pleasing bonus. Recommended.



UltraRacer

RRP \$89.95

The setting: an average office after 5pm, network gaming session about to commence. Racing games are decided upon as the entertainment. Seven of the eight office network racers flex their fingers, place them on the cursor keys and steel themselves for the pain ahead. One racer opens his top drawer and takes out his UltraRacer. 10 minutes later the first race is over. Seven racers have sore fingers and sad lap times, racer eight is a happy and relaxed winner. The crowd goes wild.

The UltraRacer is pretty damn weird - it's also pretty damn sensible. A hand-held mini steering wheel and accelerator is what this is, something the world needed, no doubt.

The wheel moves very nicely and is rubber coated. The trigger throttle has a good range of movement and overall control of your vehicle is just as effective as a full-sized wheel and pedal set.

The 4 fire buttons are ergonomically placed - the average full sized wheel only has 2 buttons...

All up, a winner. We're impressed and InterAct aren't getting this back unless they send the boys around.

Flight Force Plus

RRP \$69.95

Great idea this. Fresh concept, innovative and original. Like many things that fit this description, it unfortunately sinks. The caper is thus: right hand on the joystick or mouse, depending on the type of game you're playing, left hand on the Flight Force Plus. There are nine pro-



gram-mable buttons, including the center pad, which is one big button.

Instead of using a possibly non-programmable keyboard, you play button/key pressing with the Flight Force Plus. There's even a macro selector, use it so your snappy programmed moves happen when you hit your pre-programmed button.

And now for the big "unfortunately"... The ergonomics are plain awful. Unless you've got the hand of a 5 year old you're just not going to ever get a comfortable hand position. Also unfortunate are the buttons themselves. They are clunky and cheap and any keyboard will feel better under-hand, which defeats the purpose of the Flight Force Plus. We look forward to Mk II.

Contact NRG on 02 9938 0798 for more info.



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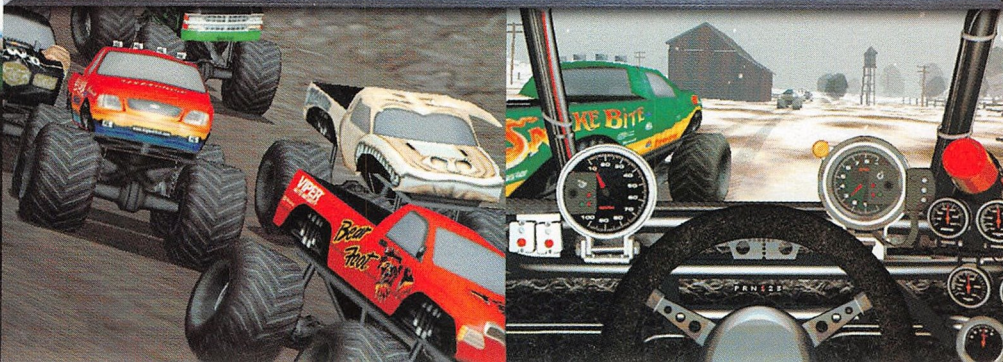


MONSTER TRUCK MADNESS 2

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56K NETSPEED

56Kbps Modems Benchtested

56Kbps modem technology is here today and implemented in most new modems. And now it's official: according to our tests, 56Kbps does provide some significant speed improvements for downloading.

Overview of the field

All of these modems are backwards-compatible with V.34+ (33.6Kbps), send and receive faxes up to 14.4Kbps, and seven of the modems support SVD (Simultaneous Voice and Data). The latter is a technology which allows you to speak with a person who also has an SVD modem while simultaneously transferring data between your PCs.

Nine of the modems were external and came with cabling for PCs, one was an internal PC modem (ISA card) and one a PCMCIA model for laptop use. All the modems claim to support 56Kbps: nine of these use 'k56flex' technology, while the two US Robotics models use 'x2'. (See sidebar for information on the standards).

Nine of the modems also allow flash upgrades to their software, which means that provided the ITU-T standard for 56Kbps (see sidebar) does not require any hardware changes you should be able to upgrade your modem whether you have k56flex or x2 technology. And it also means you can keep up with revisions to the software as improvements become available.

The act of unwrapping a new toy, ignoring the manuals and plugging it in can have a big impact on your success with it in day-to-day operations, so the design of the packaging, the unit itself, and, when you get around to reading them, the manuals, can be critical.

From the austere packaging of the US Robotics Courier, to the triangular Banskia box with the curvy modem in full view, these manufacturers all have their own idea of packaging. Almost all of them came with Internet starter kits, drivers for Windows 95 and NT, power supplies, phone cables, manuals, and lots of software to get started.

OVERSIZED

The USR Courier (used as one of our dial-in test units in the Raw Power test) has been a revered device by the ISP community for many years for its reliability and power, but this comes at a price, for this modem is positively huge. It also makes no mention (except a sticker on the box) of being able to achieve 56Kb; indeed the box contains a small paper insert explaining what the difference is between V. FC and V.34, indicating this modem's age. Its power supply is thunderous, and would chew two or

• **US Robotics Sportster**
USR went for style points with the Sportster. Small, bundled with free games and utilities, the Sportster is perfect as a starter modem.

• **Micronica Jumbuck**
Despite generally good performance, the Jumbuck disappointed with poor documentation and a somewhat agricultural feel to the construction.

three powerboard slots, but on the upside there are many well-labeled lights on the front allowing extensive monitoring of the connection.

FREEBIES

Almost at the other end of the scale, the USR Sportster Flash comes in a colourful box crammed full of goodies, including a CD-ROM containing Web browsers, games, communications utilities, and more. The modem itself is a relatively small device with well-labeled LEDs. Both of these, along with some other US-made modems come with a DIY phone cable (you just plug the long

cable into the supplied telephone jack plug), and some even come with extra flavours of telephone jack plugs, in case you suddenly wake up in a foreign country.

SMALL & SLEEK

The Netcomm Roadster Ultra SVD is a very small and sleek device, with a small friendly power supply. It has its own flavour of serial cable terminated with a round plug, comes with a piggy-back style phone cable as there is nowhere to plug a handset into the modem itself, and

• **US Robotics Courier**
Both the modem and its power supply are huge. Aesthetics aside, the Courier is engineered to be tough and reliable.

also has a socket to plug in the microphone headset (included for SVD functions). On the downside the speaker is on-or-off only and the LEDs are hard to see unless you tilt the modem so the front is facing. The near-identical Roadster 56 flex comes in much the same package minus the ability to do SVD. Its PCMCIA sibling also comes in nearly identical packaging, minus the SVD capabilities and implemented on a type II card. The speaker functions through the laptop speaker



if you have one, and is either ear-piercing or off. Interestingly the Roadsters also come in 'x2' flavour, though both the models we tested were k56flex.

LARGE, CLEAR LED'S

The Banksia comes in an attractive package which lets you see the modem, cables to connect it to your sound card, and a CD-ROM for installation which includes Internet browsers. The machine itself has a small footprint with large clear LEDs, and a volume control knob on the side for that late-night modem user.

IRQ CONFLICTS

The Dynalink Internal modem promises that weird mystique in the PC world — IRQ conflicts; its manuals couldn't seem to agree on whether it came as a COM3 device or a COM2 device, and it demanded to take over an IRQ I was already using, so that could cause problems if you've got a lot

of extra cards already. Not being able to see the lights is a bit strange because you never know what the modem's up to, but the on-board speaker is a big help during negotiation. Once installed and working it's nice to know you haven't had to muck about with serial cables and power supplies to get it there. It also comes with an offer to get a free copy of Quake, VoiceGuard or InternetPhone to help you utilise the modem for something interesting without having to buy extra software.

JINXED JUMBUCK

While the packaging of the Micronica Jumbuck DSV is plain but functional, we couldn't get it to go at 56Kb without some changes to the settings which weren't documented in the odd collection of manuals and bits of paper that came with it. It appeared to have been shipped with some US settings which are incompatible with the Australian phone system. It comes with the Bitware answering machine software and communications goodies on floppy disks.

EASE OF USE

The Hayes Accura 56Kb SP has a plain white casing which includes sockets for microphones and speakers for the SVD function, while its non-SP sibling looks the same but is minus the speaker and sockets. This modem also has easy to read LEDs and a not-too huge plug pack. It also comes with extensive documentation for the included speakerphone software and communications tools.

The Diamond SupraExpress is a nice small device with the serial cable built into it, although the LEDs are hidden behind their labels which can make them hard to see.

Installation of all these modems was much the same: either they are automatically detected at boot-up, and then you supply the floppy disk or CD-ROM with the drivers when prompted, or else you can start the process manually by adding a new modem in the control panel. The Banksia Wave, Netcomm Roadster 56 flex, and US Robotics Sportster came with a plethora of

REALITY CHECK

Do you REALLY need 56kbps?

A conventional modem uses a series of tones to encode digital information and send it over the analogue phone system (also known as the PSTN). In Australia, many suburban PSTN systems are now fully digital between the exchanges, so your data is converted into analogue (by your modem), then digital (by your local telephone exchange), then analogue (at the ISP end exchange), and then, finally, to digital (by the ISP's modem). Many modem dial-in machines today are digital and use ISDN, and so the last digital-to-analogue-to-digital conversion between the last exchange and the ISP may no longer be done.

56Kbps takes advantage of this, because the removal of the last analogue stage provides a cleaner signal which lends itself to higher speeds. The 56Kbps technology requires that you call a digital modem machine such as you'd find in many ISPs; you can't do 56Kbps between two plain 56Kbps modems (therefore our real world test; see sidebar "How we tested"). The 56Kbps speed is theoretical, and one way. The maximum upload speed a 56Kbps modem can achieve is 33.6Kbps, while the download speed tends to range greatly between 38Kbps and 50Kbps.

There were two competing 56Kbps options in the marketplace — one from Lucent/Rockwell (called k56flex) and the other from US Robotics (now 3Com) called 'x2'. The two versions are, naturally, incompatible with each other.

However, last month, the groups have agreed on a preliminary standard. Both x2 and k56flex modem manufacturers are promising upgrades to the new standard (whatever it is called), either free, or at cost, when the standard is ratified. Currently the time frame for this is



"...56Kbps takes advantage of this, because the removal of the last analogue stage provides a cleaner signal which lends itself to higher speeds"

September 1998. Until then, you'll need to check with your ISP as to which of the two versions it supports (if not both) and choose your modem accordingly. Both options (and the new standard) are compatible with slower modem speeds as well, so buying a 56Kbps modem even if your ISP only does 33.6Kbps right now is not a bad choice if you currently don't own a modem.

In the US, where both the 56Kbps technologies are now widespread, ISPs have some advantages over their Australian counterparts: ISDN lines are significantly cheaper and faster to deploy; digital modem hardware is cheaper; and most importantly, bandwidth is much cheaper. If your ISP changed to 56Kbps, the extra bandwidth which everyone could get access to from their 56Kbps connections may send them broke overnight! So if your ISP is slow to deploy 56Kbps, keep these factors in mind, and expect to pay a higher price for 56Kbps connections.

Information about the two competing technologies can be found at <http://www.lucent.com/k56flex/> (for k56flex) and <http://x2.usr.com> (for X2).

56kbps modems

software on CD-ROM, which you can optionally install after you get the modem running, and includes Web browsers, useful answering machine software and SVD capable software.

TESTING

We devised a couple of tests for the modems so you could see the difference in performance between them: a back-to-back test where we had the modems transferring files between each other, and a real-world test where we tested their 56Kb performance using an ISP. (See the side panels 'How we tested' and 'About 56Kb' for more details).

SPEED

The performance in the Raw Power test was almost identical for all these modems. In fact their ability to compress plain text was probably held up by the 115200 baud serial line speed we limited them to; some modems

will talk at 230Kbps to your PC, but we kept them all the same so as not to introduce too many variables. All of the modems negotiated perfectly at 33.6Kbps with both the Netcomm and the USR modems, and there were no detected retrains or errors during transmission through our line emulator. When transferring through the emulator, we were not able to test how well these modems cope with poor line quality. This is one area in which the USRs and the Australian brands (Netcomm and Banksia) have excelled in our experience with ISPs in the past,

• **Banksia Wave 56SP (left)**
The Australian-made Banksia wins bonus points for innovative design. Doubling as a hands-free speaker phone, it looks great and runs reliably.

• **Netcomm Roadster 56 Ultra (right)**
Small and sleek, with a power supply that won't hog your powerboard, the Roadster had difficulty to see LEDs, but was otherwise of typical Netcomm quality.

so it is something to keep in mind. See table 1 for details.

When it came to the real world test, we got some variable results; notably the Netcomm Cardmodem56 could not even

maintain a 56Kbps connection long enough to begin testing. The Hayes Accura only completed 1 out of 9 tests, the rest of the time dropping out or freezing permanently during the transfer.

FLASH UPGRADES

Both the Hayes Accura modems went disastrously at first in the real world tests, until we downloaded the latest flash software from the Hayes Web site. The act of upgrading the flash software is quite painless and gave us a preview of what it might be like getting these modems to be ITU-T compatible when that standard comes out. Sadly the Hayes Accura 56Kb SP still didn't want to play even with the new software, which we thought was strange given the two modems seem almost identical. The non-SP model was totally transformed by the upgrade and took off at blistering speed

33.6 Kbps performance table

Netcomm Cardmodem 56	SEND	29505
	RECEIVE	29839
* USR Courier V. Everything	SEND	29701
	RECEIVE	30035
USR Sportster Flash	SEND	33752
	RECEIVE	30074
Banksia Wave 56 SP	SEND	29890
	RECEIVE	30002
* Netcomm Roadster 56 Ultra SVD	SEND	29938
	RECEIVE	30167
Netcomm Roadster 56 flex	SEND	29934
	RECEIVE	30057
Micronica Jumbuck DSV 56Kb	SEND	30019
	RECEIVE	30184
Hayes Accura 56Kb SP	SEND	29400
	RECEIVE	30135
Diamond SupraExpress 56Kb	SEND	29943
	RECEIVE	30180
Dynalink 56Kb Internal	SEND	30001
	RECEIVE	29835
Hayes Accura 56Kb	SEND	29473
	RECEIVE	30081

NOTES:

Modems were tested by dialling into both the Netcomm Roadster and the USR Courier using the line emulator. A 1024Kb text file and a 1024Kb compressed file were sent and received 3 times each and the results averaged. Figures shown are in cps (characters per second).

Note: These tests all yielded only 33.6Kbps connections (due to the line emulator and 56Kbps implementation).

Please see Table 2 for the 56Kbps results.

• Longer bars are better

• Best result

THE TESTS:

- 1 — Send raw text file of 1024Kb to Netcomm Roadster average
- 2 — Receive raw text file of 1024Kb from Netcomm Roadster average
- 3 — Send raw text file of 1024Kb to USR Courier average
- 4 — Receive raw text file of 1024Kb from USR Courier average
- 5 — Send GNU compressed file of 1024Kb to Netcomm Roadster average
- 6 — Receive GNU compressed file of 1024Kb from Netcomm Roadster average
- 7 — Send GNU compressed file of 1024Kb to USR Courier average
- 8 — Receive GNU compressed file of 1024Kb from USR Courier average

* Test modems

Testing

How we tested

when it came time to try the tests again, resulting in a fairly high overall result.

TRUE PERFORMANCE

All the other modems negotiated acceptably, although some dropped out during downloads. The Micronica Jumbuck DSV, both US Robotics models, and Banksia Wave never dropped out, while the Netcomm Roadster was the fastest and only had 1 dropout. As we expected there is very little difference between the k56flex and x2 technology as far as reliability and download speeds are concerned. We did find that the Diamond SupraExpress and the Dynalink 56Kb were more prone to dropouts and had slower throughput than the others.

DOWNLOAD SPEED

Overall the improvement of 56Kbps for a compressed file over 33.6Kbps was around 30%, which makes a pretty big difference if you're downloading a lot. Web surfing in general is a fair bit faster too, partly because there is more scope for compression when downloading Web pages as opposed to large files. Playing games like Quake or Kali on-line won't improve that much because the upstream speed is still only 33.6Kbps.

In order to truly test these modems for their different applications required a pair of tests. The first test, which we called the raw power test, showed the throughput at 33.6Kbps in both directions that these modems could do while communicating with one another. The 'real world' test aimed to show how these modems would perform in day-to-day use, dialling a 56Kbps capable ISP, establishing a PPP connection, and doing some transfers over TCP/IP. Between the tests you can see the theoretical and real world behaviour of the modems. Because of the nature of the 56Kbps technology, the ISP end of the equation is a digital modem solution which uses ISDN, and the high speed part of the connection is only on receive (download). Since this is what you mostly do when connected to the Internet that's fine, but be aware the 56Kbps performance shouldn't be your only consideration.

Raw power test

To test the raw throughput of the modems, we used a telephone line emulator which produces ideal and consistent line quality between two modems. The modems can call each other

without actually involving the real phone system. We hooked up a Linux PC with 133MHz CPU and 64Mb RAM to act as a 'dial-in' server running a standard communications package at 115200 baud to a Netcomm Roadster and a USR Courier.

These two were chosen as the two more popular dial-in analogue modems which ISPs in Australia use, and to ascertain if there were any differences between the Rockwell and USR implementations of V.34+.

For the client end, we used a Windows 95 Pentium 133 PC with 32Mb RAM, and Hyperterminal. The drivers for each of the tested modems were loaded, the modem connected at 115200, and then we sent and received a 1Mb raw text file and a 1Mb highly compressed (using GNU Zip level 9) file using Zmodem 3 times, and averaged the results. The aim of the test was to show the ability of the modem to compress data and maintain high throughput over a number of tests. Given the almost perfect line conditions this test didn't say anything about whether a modem was any good at handling poor line quality or multi-tasked connections. In most cases the compression speed

(raw text transfer) was just short of the maximum speed available to a 115200 baud serial connection. (see table)

Real world test

We dialled into two ISP services depending on the flavour of 56Kbps modem, one which supported X2 and the other k56Flex. We connected three times, measured the reported connect speed (if the modem supported such reporting — some did not) and then downloaded and uploaded a text file and compressed file over FTP — the same files as in the raw power tests. The test results were then averaged. (see table)

This test is a more useful guide for comparing the modems, but there are a number of variables: the PSTN telephone system, and whether there was a 'bad' line at the exchange; the reliability of the digital modem we connected to; and how busy the local LAN and UNIX machine which housed the files we were downloading was. We did the tests at the same time each day in order to try and keep the amount of traffic in the phone system and on the ISP's network constant in our tests.

Real world test results

Modem	Overall download speed averaged over 9 downloads (cps) <small>Longer bars are better</small>	C. Speed	Dropouts
USR Courier V. Everything x2	4570	N/A	0
USR Sportster Flash x2	4898	49,733	0
Banksia Wave 56 SP	4836	50,667	0
Netcomm Roadster 56 Ultra SVD	5280	50,000	1
Micronica Jumbuck DSV 56k	4771	N/A	0
Hayes Accura 56K SP	4628	46,000	8
Diamond SupraExpress 56k	3979	48,000	3
Dynalink 56k Internal	4294	40,667	3
Netcomm Roadster 56 flex	4894	50,000	0
Hayes Accura 56K	4666	50,000	0

Legend

C.Speed: Average connect speed over 3 tests
(N/A indicates modem would not report DCE speed)

Dropouts: Number of dropouts during testing
The modems noted as X2 use USR's X2 technology. All others use Lucent and Rockwell's K56flex technology.

Notes

Modems were tested by dialling into an appropriate 56Kbps service and downloading a 1052700 byte compressed file 3 times. Each test was completed 3 times giving a possible 9 successful downloads.

The number of dropouts, and the average connect speed reported were also measured. The transfers were done over an established PPP connection using an FTP client.

- The Netcomm Cardmodem 56 was unable to sustain a connection at greater than 33.6Kbps for long enough to initiate tests, and Netcomm was unable to provide assistance, so this modem was excluded from this part of the test.
- The Hayes Accura SP only succeeded once during the 9 tests. All other tests failed due to drop outs or freezes. Its non-SP buddy required a flash upgrade to work but then worked OK.
- All speeds of downloads are in characters per second (cps).

56kbps modems

THE VERDICT

As 33.6Kbps modems, all of those tested perform adequately, but when it came to 56Kbps there was a wide range of performance and reliability. Referring to Table 3, our overall tied winners were the Netcomm Roadster 56 and the US Robotics Sportster Flash. The modems performed almost equally well, with the USR having the edge on reliability. Interestingly these two modems use the two opposing 56Kbps technologies, k56flex for the Netcomm modem and X2 for the USR model, which goes to show there is not a lot of difference between the standards. The Netcomm modem has the edge on price, and comes with those groovy headphone/microphone things for SVD. In the end, it may come down to which standard your ISP supports. Meanwhile modems like the Banksia Wave

have a cool "I'm not a modem" shape and loads of SOHO features like answering machine software and Web browsers.

While the other modems may not have performed as well, the Dynalink, Diamond and Micronica modems are all very well priced and did their job admirably. If you don't need the ultimate in performance they are unbeatable packages for the price, especially given the Dynalink comes with a head-phone/microphone set too.

STANDARDS

One thing to keep in mind is protecting your investment by ensuring that your modem is upgradable to the latest version of the modem software, and possibly, the ITU-T standard. No one is really sure yet whether this standard will require hard-

ware changes to modems, but if it doesn't you won't need to go out and buy another modem.

The Hayes modem and the Netcomm Cardmodem both displayed problems which may well have been resolved by the time you read this.

THE FUTURE

What will the future hold for 56Kbps? Once the standard is finally ratified, many of the ISPs who are presently holding back may begin to offer 56Kbps — although in some cases this will be at a higher price. Since almost all modem manufacturers currently produce 56Kbps modems, and the technology seems to work well, 56Kbps seems here to stay. And, unlike

many modem upgrades in the past, the price for 56Kbps modems is very appealing indeed. With modem manufacturers promising free flash upgrades to the new standard, and with ISDN at its current high prices, it's unlikely we'll get any faster way to get on the net at a low price anytime soon, so our advice is — go shopping!



• **Netcomm Cardmodem 56**
Netcomm's Cardmodem 56 couldn't maintain 56k performance reliably, making testing virtually impossible.

Modem conclusions

Modem	Distributor	Phone	Internet	PC	Mac	S	F	33.6Kbps	56Kbps	Reliability	Overall
Netcomm Cardmodem 56	Netcomm Australia	02 9888 5533	www.netcomm.com.au	\$399	\$409	N	Y	★★★	★	★	★★
USR Courier V.Everything	US Robotics/3Com	03 9934 8888	www.usr.com.au	\$369	\$394	N	Y	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
USR Sportster Flash	US Robotics/3Com	03 9934 8888	www.usr.com.au	\$259	\$259	Y	Y	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Banksia Wave 56 SP	Banksia	02 9424 2020	www.banksia.com.au	\$349	\$349	Y	Y	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Netcomm Roadster 56 Ultra SVD	Netcomm Australia	02 9888 5533	www.netcomm.com.au	\$299	\$309	Y	Y	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Micronica Jumbuck DSV 56	Micronica	03 9699 8844	www.micronica.com.au	\$195	\$195	Y	N	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Hayes Accura 56K SP	Hayes	02 9959 5544	www.hayes.com	\$291	\$291	Y	Y	★★★★	★★★★	★	★★★
Diamond SupraExpress 56k	Diamond	02 9381 6000	www.diamond.com	\$279	\$279	Y	Y	★★★★★	★★	★★★	★★★
Dynalink 56k Internal	Askey Australia	1800 357 253	www.dynalink.com.au	\$219	\$279	Y	N	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★
Netcomm Roadster 56 flex	Netcomm Australia	02 9888 5533	www.netcomm.com.au	\$279	\$289	N	Y	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Hayes Accura 56K	Hayes	02 9959 5544	www.hayes.com	\$291	\$291	N	Y	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★

■ NOTES: ★ = bad, ★★★★★ = good.

LEGEND:

S - Has the SVD feature

F - Flash upgradable

33.6Kbps - Performance rating in 33.6Kbps test

56Kbps - Performance rating in 56Kbps test

Reliability - Reliability rating on 56Kbps test

Overall - Overall Rating



■ BANKSIA WAVE 56 SP



■ NETCOMM ROADSTER 56 ULTRA

56KBPS
MODEMS



■ US ROBOTICS COURIER



■ MICRONICA JUMBUCK



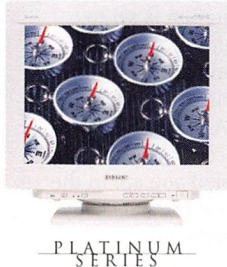
■ NETCOMM CARDMODEM 56



■ US ROBOTICS SPORTSTER

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THE SOCKET 7 MOTHERBOARD SHOWDOWN

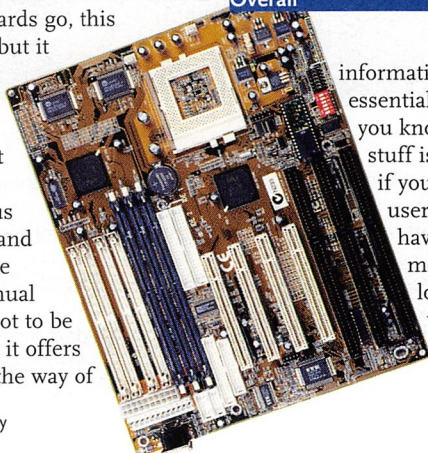
This month in the PowerPlay Labs we have a great selection of Socket 7 motherboards to put through their paces. We have also been able to include a Super 7 based system board into the fray. With the ability to run the system bus at 100MHz, it certainly makes a big speed difference. End result: Games run faster.

Shuttle Hot 571 Abit AB-AX5

SPECIFICATIONS

Form Factor	AT/ATX
Board Size	220mm x 280mm
System Bus Speeds	50, 60, 66, 75, 83.3MHz
Clock multiplier Settings	1.5x - 5.5x
Voltage Support	2.1, 2.8, 2.9, 3.0, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, and 3.52v
System memory	EDO and SDRAM 3.3v - 4 SIMM Slots / 3 DIMM Slots
Total System Memory Supported	256MB
Cache Memory onboard	512KB (Pipeline Burst)
Chipset	Intel 430TX
Expansion Slots	3 x ISA, 4 x PCI
Serial Ports	2
Parallel Ports	1
Other Ports	USB, PS/2 Mouse
IDE Interface	Dual channel IDE Ultra DMA/33
BIOS	AWARD
Other Features	CPU voltage auto-detect, support for both ATX and AT power, modem ring power-on, CPU thermal monitoring, Fan monitoring, System Voltage monitoring
Supplier	Integral Computers (www.integralcomputers.com.au)
Cost	TBA

This motherboard only managed to get first in one of the benchmark tests, although to its credit, it wasn't too far behind the front runners. As motherboards go, this isn't too bad but it really doesn't inspire me. To the Hot-571's credit, it does support the higher bus speeds of 75 and 83.3MHz. The supplied manual does leave a lot to be desired since it offers very little in the way of



Mainboard design	90
Speed	88
Features	86
Overclockability	94
Overall	89.5

information, just the essentials. Which if you know your stuff is okay, but if you are a new user I would have to recommend you look elsewhere.

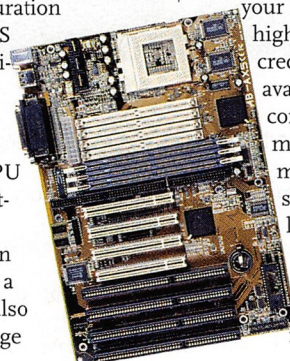
SPECIFICATIONS

Form Factor	ATX
Board Size	Standard
System Bus Speeds	50, 55, 60, 66, 75, 83.3MHz
Clock multiplier Settings	1.5x - 3.5x
Voltage Support	setup through BIOS
System memory	EDO and SDRAM 3.3v - 4 SIMM Slots / 3 DIMM Slots
Total System Memory Supported	256MB
Cache Memory onboard	512KB (Pipeline Burst)
Chipset	Intel 430TX
Expansion Slots	4 x ISA, 4 x PCI
Serial Ports	2
Parallel Ports	1
Other Ports	USB, PS/2 Mouse
IDE Interface	Dual channel IDE Ultra DMA/33
BIOS	AWARD
Other Features	CPU soft menu support, CPU thermal monitoring, Fan monitoring, System Voltage monitoring, CPU voltage setup from within BIOS.
Supplier	Integral Computers (www.integralcomputers.com.au)
Cost	TBA

This motherboard certainly keeps up to Abit's high standards, but doesn't seem to quite keep up with their TX5 model. The motherboard offers all of Abit's usual added extras like CPU configuration through the BIOS and voltage monitoring. There is also a feature within the BIOS to change the CPU core and I/O voltages manually. Although this can aid in setting up a system it could also potentially damage

Mainboard design	95
Speed	90
Features	92
Overclockability	95
Overall	93

your CPU if set to a too high a voltage. To Abit's credit this feature is only available when the CPU configuration is set to manual, so for general motherboard setup this shouldn't pose a problem. A piece of electronics certainly worth a look if you are in the market for a Socket 7 motherboards.



Which Socket is for you?

	Socket 7	Super 7	Slot 1	Slot 2
Bus speed(MHz)	66-83.3	66-100,133.3!	66-133.3	100-?
CPU types	Pentium Classic Pentium MMX Cyrix 6x68,6x86MX AMD K5,K6 upto 266 IDT Winchip C6	Pentium Classic Pentium MMX Cyrix 6x68,6x86MX AMD K5,K6, K6-2 IDT Winchip C6, C6-2	Pentium II Pentium II 'Deschute' Pentium II 'Katmai'	Pentium II 'XEON' Pentium II 'Katmai'

Shuttle Hot-603

SPECIFICATIONS

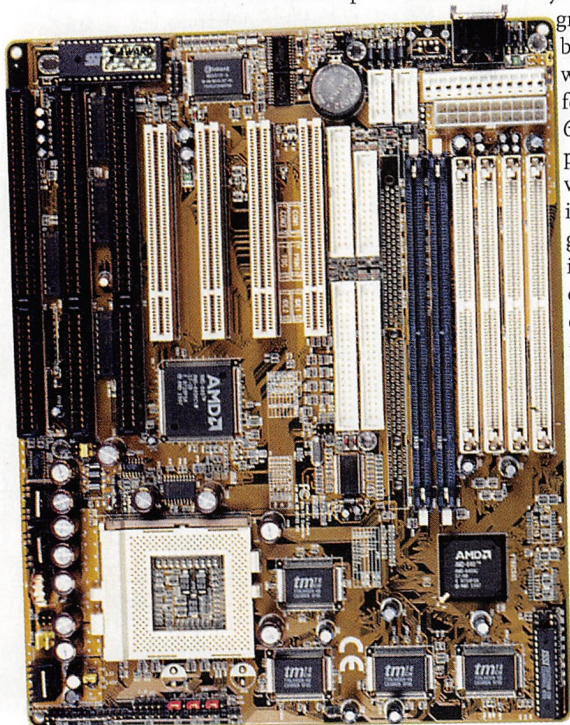
Form Factor	AT/ATX
Board Size	220mm x 280mm
System Bus Speeds	50, 55, 60, 66, 75, 83.3MHz
Clock multiplier Settings	1.5x - 5.5x
Voltage Support	2.1,2.8, 2.9, 3.2, 3.3, and 3.52v
System memory	EDO and SDRAM 3.3v - 4 SIMM Slots / 3 DIMM Slots
Total System Memory Supported	256MB
Cache Memory onboard	1024KB (Pipeline Burst)
Chipset	AMD-640 (VP2)
Expansion Slots	3 x ISA, 4 x PCI
Serial Ports	2
Parallel Ports	1
Other Ports	USB, PS/2 Mouse
IDE Interface	Dual channel IDE Ultra DMA/33
BIOS	AWARD
Other Features	1024KB of Level 2 cache, 256MB of RAM cacheable.
Supplier	Integral Computers (www.integralcomputers.com.au)
Cost	TBA

The major difference with this motherboard is the fact that it uses a non-Intel based chipset. The AMD-640 (VIA VP2) chipset, as it's known, has a lot of potential in out-gunning Intel's TX offering. This chipset has the ability to utilise up to 1024KB of level 2-cache RAM, twice the size that any Intel TX based motherboard sup-

Mainboard design	93
Speed	95
Features	90
Overclockability	95
Overall	93.25

ports. The benchmark results also reflect the AMD-640's power. A Cyrix 6x86PR2-266 would fly on this board, but as we know the Cyrix isn't that

great for games because of the weak FPU performance. The 6x86MX could prove to be a very viable CPU if future 3D graphics chips include their own geometry engines, but that's another story altogether. I would recommend this motherboard to anyone needing a fast, reliable, board for their old Socket 7 processor.

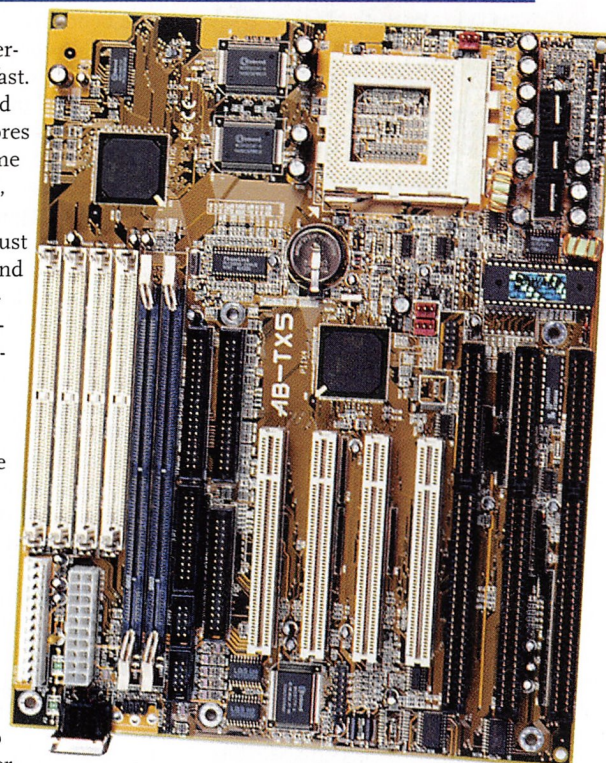


Abit AB-TX5

SPECIFICATIONS

Form Factor	AT/ATX
Board Size	220mm x 280mm
System Bus Speeds	50, 55, 60, 66, 75, 83.3MHz
Clock multiplier Setting	1.5x - 3.5x
Voltage Support	Through BIOS
System memory	EDO and SDRAM 3.3v - 4 SIMM Slots / 2 DIMM Slots
Total System Memory Supported	256MB
Cache Memory onboard	512KB (Pipeline Burst)
Chipset	Intel 430TX
Expansion Slots	3 x ISA, 4 x PCI
Serial Ports	2
Parallel Ports	1
Other Ports	USB, PS/2 Mouse
IDE Interface	Dual channel IDE Ultra DMA/33
BIOS	AWARD
Other Features	CPU soft menu support, CPU thermal monitoring, Fan monitoring, System Voltage monitoring, CPU voltages setup from within BIOS.
Supplier	Integral Computers (www.integralcomputers.com.au)
Cost	TBA

This motherboard is fast. It achieved the highest scores in all three game tests (Quake II, Turok, and Incoming). It just oozes quality and certainly showcases Abit's talents in motherboard design. They have thought of everything. The ability to clock the system bus at up to 83.3MHz through the BIOS is certainly a boon for overclockers. I still can't bring myself to give this motherboard a Hot Hardware Award - even though it is the fastest Socket 7 motherboard in our tests. This award has to go to one of the new breed of Super 7 boards.

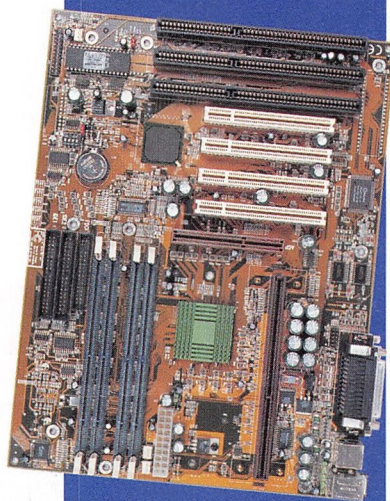


Mainboard design	93
Speed	97
Features	92
Overclockability	95
Overall	94.25

MSI-6111 Motherboard

As promised in last month's PowerPlay, we have the benchmark results from the MSI-6111 motherboard.

After we applied the BIOS upgrade from the MSI website all was well. The surprising thing is just how well the MSI-6111 motherboard actually performed. Just take a look at the benchmark results and you can see that this board is fast. It actually bested the A-Open AX6LC board in nearly all the tests. I believe that this motherboard is certainly one to look at if you are in the market for an LX based P2 board.



MDK win95 perf test

Aopen AX6LC*	91
MSI-6111	100

Norton SI CPU Mark index

Aopen AX6LC*	114.6
MSI-6111	114.2

CPUMark32

Aopen AX6LC*	606
MSI-6111	621

FPU/Winmark

Aopen AX6LC*	1200
MSI-6111	1210

Final Reality

Aopen AX6LC*	2.88
MSI-6111	2.96

Turok demo

Aopen AX6LC*	65.2
MSI-6111	67.8

* Quoted for comparison purposes.

Note: the exact same PC configuration was used as last time. The Pentium II 333MHz was underclocked to 233MHz for testing.

Epox EP-56 MVP3C-m

SPECIFICATIONS

Form Factor	AT/ATX
Board Size	220mm x 280mm
System Bus Speeds	60, 66, 75, 83.3, 100MHz
Clock multiplier Settings	1.5X - 5.0X
Voltage Support	2.1, 2.2, 2.8, 2.9, 3.2V
System memory	EDO and SDRAM 3.3V - 4 SIMM Slots / 3 DIMM Slots
Total System Memory Supported	384MB
Cache Memory onboard	512KB (Pipeline Burst)
Chipset	VIA Apollo MVP3
Expansion Slots	3 x ISA, 4 x PCI, 1x AGP
Serial Ports	2
Parallel Ports	1
Other Ports	USB, PS/2 Mouse
IDE Interface	Dual channel IDE Ultra DMA/33
BIOS	AWARD
Other Features	Keyboard power-on feature, ESDJ jumper configuration, CPU and FAN monitoring.
Supplier	Zeus Technology (Phone: (08) 9321 6969)
Cost	\$220.00

[Insert fanfare of choice here]

At last a real Super 7 motherboard... that actually works! The MVP3 chipset used on this motherboard is awesome. Support for AGP 2x with DIME and capable of bus speeds of 100MHz. As you can see from the results, I was able to get benchmark scores from an AMD K6-233 overclocked at 250MHz (2.5 x 100). This should give us a good indication of what sort of speed increase we can expect from a 100MHz-system bus frequency; quite a bit! The only problem I had with this board was finding SDRAM that would work with it at 100MHz.

The only RAM I could find that would post at a 100MHz-bus speed was one of the older SDRAM types. These SDRAM are the ones that don't have the SPD EPROM onboard. All SDRAM I tried with an SPD on them wouldn't boot. SPD stands for Serial Presence Detect and is a feature used on Pentium II based systems to recognise the SDRAM type automatically. Most socket 7 based PC's would have the older type of SDRAM. This will be less of a problem once these Super 7 boards go through a few BIOS revisions, it's probably just slight timing problems.

The fact is that if you want the ultimate PC and don't want

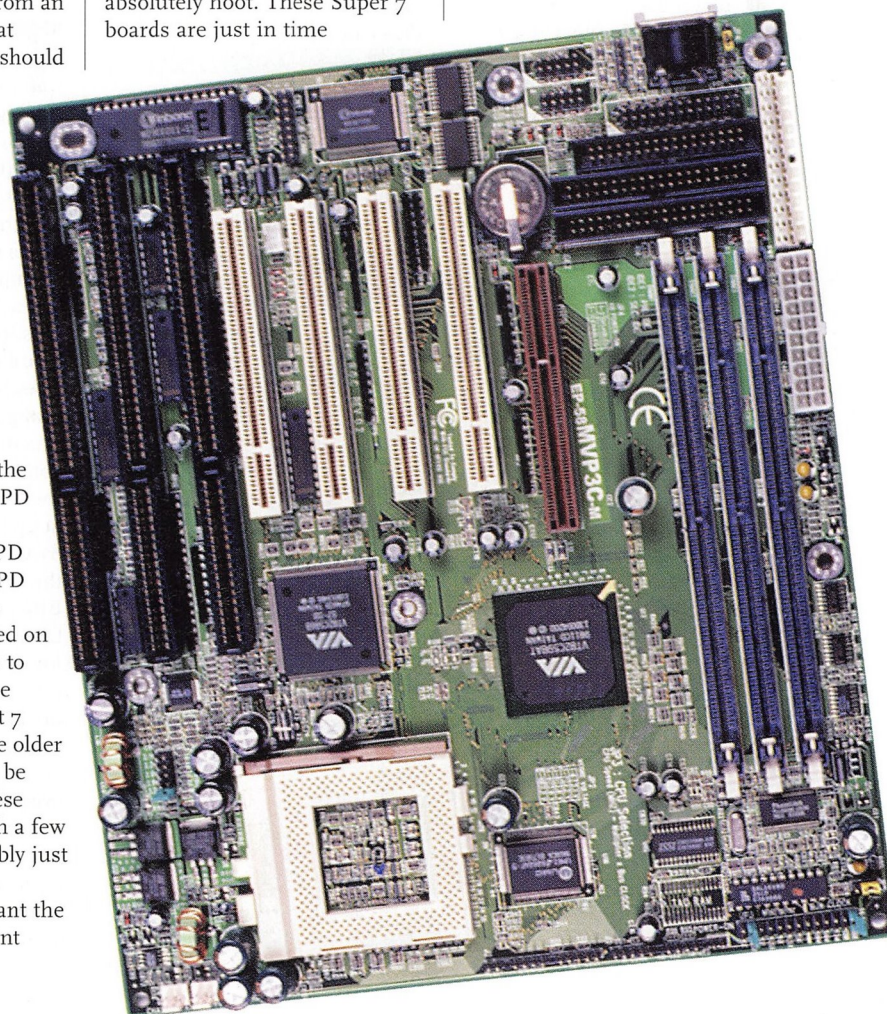
Intel inside, then this Epox motherboard is the ultimate socket 7 capable board in this review. A lot more of these Super 7 boards will hit the market very soon. I have heard of Super 7 boards that allow a bus frequency of 133.3MHz. A K6 running at 133.3 x 2 would absolutely hoot. These Super 7 boards are just in time

PC PowerPlay ULTIMATE HARD WARE

for the release of the much talked about AMD K6-2 processor with the '3DNow!' instructions.

Quite a few industry analysts were saying that they didn't believe a workable Super 7 board would be available by the K6-2's release date, but it looks like they were wrong. The best thing is that this motherboard does support the 2.2-volt Vcore voltage that will be necessary to use a K6-2 processor. If AMD can make it to volume production on this processor quickly, Intel could find themselves behind AMD for the second time in PC history. Buy this board now and get an AMD K6-2 later - perfect!

Mainboard design	93
Speed	93
Features	97
Overclockability	97
Overall	95



Motherboard comparison

Motherboard Type	Norton	CPUMark32	FPU/Winmark	Final Reality	Quake 2	Turok demo	Incoming
Intel TX Based							
Shuttle HOT-569/571	90.9	526	760	2.38*	23.9	56.9	23.62
Abit AB-AX5	92.9	535	762	2.37	23.9	57.0	23.66
Abit AB-TX5	91.4	528	776*	2.33	24.1*	57.5*	26.64*
AMD 640 Based							
Shuttle HOT-603	94.5*	536*	759	2.38*	24.1*	56.4	24.40
VIA MVP3 Based							
EpoX EP-56MVP3C-m (3.5x66MHz)	89.8	490	760	2.28	23.7	55.0	23.35
EpoX EP-56MVP3C-m (2.5x100MHz)	116.1	668	817	2.57	26.2	73.1	28.52

* indicates fastest performer in each benchmark

Performance Results

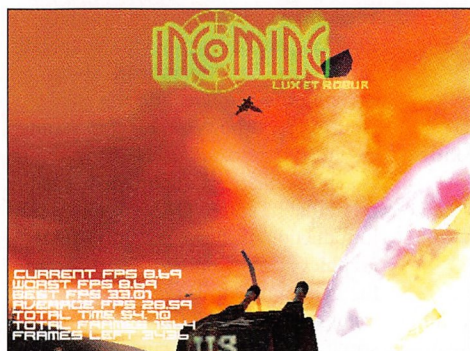
From the results you can see that the Shuttle HOT-603 and the Abit TX5 both came equal first with four 1st places in the benchmarks each. What is interesting is that the Abit did better in the game-oriented benchmark tests. This certainly is what most gamers are looking for after all, so the Abit seems to edge slightly further in front.

When you also take into account Abit's great Soft CPU configuration BIOS options, the Abit starts to look even more enticing.

The Abit TX5 is certainly a Socket 7 board to be reckoned with but I still can't help feeling that it's not worth buying a Socket 7 board anymore. Not when Super 7 boards are avail-

able now! I must say that I am eagerly waiting to get my hands on some more Super 7 motherboards from other vendors. Until then if you are in the market for a new motherboard for your Socket 7 style processor then you certainly can't go past the EpoX MVP3 motherboard.

Incoming; one of our new benchmark tests. It's such a pity a game this pretty is so average, though



TEST MACHINE CONFIGURATION

Processor : AMD K6 233MHz CPU

RAM : 2 x 32 MB SDRAM DIMM (PC-66 Spec.)

Hard Drive : Fujitsu M1636TAU (1.6GB) Intel Bus-master drivers used.

Video Card : Diamond Stealth 64 Video VRAM 4MB

3D Accelerator : Diamond Monster 3D (GRX clock set to 57MHz, Sync to refresh off).

Sound Card : TeraSound 64 PCI

CD-ROM : Acer 24x MAX ATAPI

OS : Windows 95 OSR2.1 with USB Supplement patch (build 1212)

DirectX 5.0

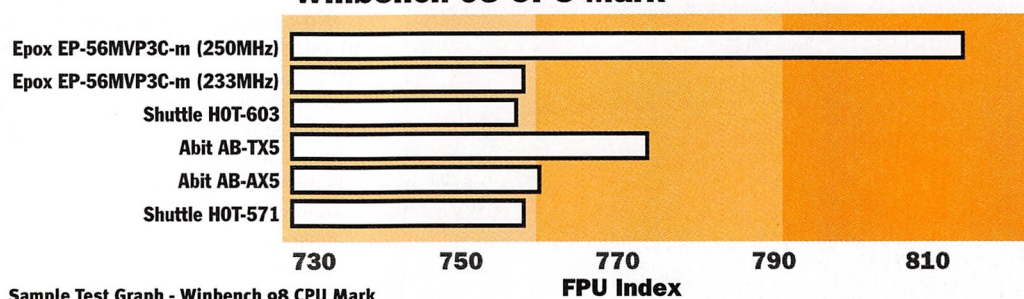
Glide 2.43

Diamond Monster 3D drivers 1.09

Diamond GT Turbo drivers

Note : Windows 95 and all software were re-loaded for each motherboard before testing

Winbench 98 CPU Mark



Sample Test Graph - Winbench 98 CPU Mark

The score and more

As you see from these pages we have four different scores that make up a motherboard's overall score.

Motherboard design

This is a percentage score for the overall quality of the motherboard from a design standpoint. When a motherboard is initially conceived, a considerable amount of time needs to be spent in the design stages. Where do we put heat-dissipating capacitors for best results? How many expansion slots should we include, etc. Motherboards that have obviously been well thought out will receive a higher score.

Speed

Now this is pretty self-explanatory, but you might be wondering how the speed score is actually calculated. Each motherboard is graded by the amount of benchmark categories it wins. The lower the amount of wins the lower the percentage score.

Features

This is the extra added value that the motherboard's manufacturer has added to their motherboard. Boards that don't offer the user extra convenience will not score

highly here. Extras that are common include full system monitoring, core voltage, fan speed, etc. Extras that are uncommon are CPU configuration through the BIOS and other wonderful goodies.

CPU Support/Overclockability

For the last set of benchmarks we called this category 'Overclockability'. What this score is for is to judge whether the motherboard supports a wide variety of processors, from lowly Pentium 90's to high end K6 - 2's running at high speed. The motherboard will also get a higher score here if it allows for insanely high clock rates, allowing you to push your processor to the max.

Once we have all four scores for a motherboard, we calculate the overall total with some simple arithmetic.

You may have also noticed we have deleted one benchmark from the last month's suite and added another. I didn't believe that the MDK performance test was doing a good enough job anymore, so I replaced it with the Incoming: Dux et robur Gameindex, which is I believe a much better gauge of game performance than a synthetic benchmark like the MDK performance test.

HOME ARCADE

Arcade gaming on your PC

Intel's Open Arcade Architecture brings Coin-op quality to the Home PC.

The rate at which users have embraced 3D accelerator technology is astounding. The transition time from a luxury to a necessity has been impressively short.

Now a must-have component in today's PC game system, the 3D accelerator is now the big gun in an assault being launched by Intel on the coin-op arcade scene. The ultimate benefit to PC gamers is that soon we'll be able to experience cutting edge 3D arcade games on our home PC.

Games look hotter, play faster and do more damage to the senses when 3D accelerated. While the recent release of the 32bit and 64bit consoles posed a temporary threat to the dominant position of the PC as the ultimate games machine, the 3D card explosion has kept the PC king of the hill.

Intel Inside - Arcade Machines

Standing for Open Arcade Architecture, and developed by Intel, OAA

ment systems, with a focus on 3D graphics, 3D audio, and possibly MPEG-2 video. The recommended specification includes hardware and basic infrastructure software for coin-op. It provides a base of functionality and performance, so that software developers can target a stable high end platform. It also prevents incompatibilities or deficiencies that might arise among various graphics, audio, and peripheral, and driver components."

Put simply, the OAA is an initiative developed by Intel to give game developers most of what is needed to create arcade quality games for the coin-op environment. The twist - OAA based arcade games are all powered by basically the same computer that sits on your desktop at home. So, the OAA is not an arcade specific board, nor some magic new piece of technology developed to stun, and take the arcades by storm. It is quite literally a standard home PC powered by a Pentium II processor, whacked into an arcade cabinet, and given all the trimmings to allow an arcade experience - like a coin-operated interface, joysticks, etc. Intel provide the specifications, the developers work about weaving their magic, and the end result is a PC-powered cabinet standing in the arcades.

The single most important development that has given OAA viability is the introduction of cheap, powerful, 3D graphics accelerators. With such a card, the PC can now truly churn out graphics of similar quality and at the same speed to arcade games currently doing

"Intel provide the specifications, the developers work about weaving their magic, and the end result is a PC-powered cabinet standing in the arcades."

is a reference platform designed to provide developers with a base for high-end entertainment titles.

Part of the OAA mission statement from Intel:

"The reference platform, based on the Pentium II processor, provides for PC-based arcade-level entertain-

the rounds. Intel know this, so armed with OAA, are preparing to take on the arcade industry at their own game.

Why is Arcade different?

To fully appreciate the implications of OAA and its quest to crack the arcade market, it's necessary to have a better understanding of the arcade industry. Quite separate from the home gaming, arcade based games go through a rather different

It is quite literally a standard home PC powered by a Pentium II processor, whacked into an arcade cabinet, and given all the trimmings to allow an arcade experience

development process. The most important factor, and understandably the most expensive, is creating the heart of the machine - the processor. Arcade giants like SEGA spend millions developing the boards that power such arcade hits as Daytona and Sega Rally. Developers are a precious commodity, since they really need to have a sound understanding of the boards which are designed - obviously a trade secret that is really pushed at remaining unknown.

On a design level, arcade games have completely different gameplay goals than a home title. Rather than having the complexity and options to satisfy the consumer with 40+ hours of non-timed gameplay, the arcade game plays for around three minutes at a time, and must be satisfying enough to get the customer back to the machine for repeated plays.

The Arcade Game

The most cut-throat aspect of the industry however, and the most dictatorial, is the quest for floor space. Relating to the high development costs mentioned earlier, the latest hot new arcade title is an extremely expensive prospect to the vendor. For this reason, a new arcade game today must be so promising, there is almost no doubt of its success. If it's not making money from day one of release, it dies a quick and sudden death and is promptly replaced by the next "hot new thing".

Highly competitive

Clearly, the arcade industry is a difficult one to crack. With OAA, Intel want to do just that. Thanks to dropping hardware prices and the introduction of the graphics accelerator, Intel deem the time to be right to take on a previously untouched

potential market. And Intel may just succeed. The reason being that OAA provides an alternative to the currently high demands of proprietary arcade systems. Purchasing the latest release from one of the major arcade developers sets back the vendor just under one hundred thousand dollars. If the game doesn't sell well, it must be completely replaced by another title.

This is perhaps OAA's greatest strength. Since an OAA arcade unit is little more than a cabinet with a relatively low cost,

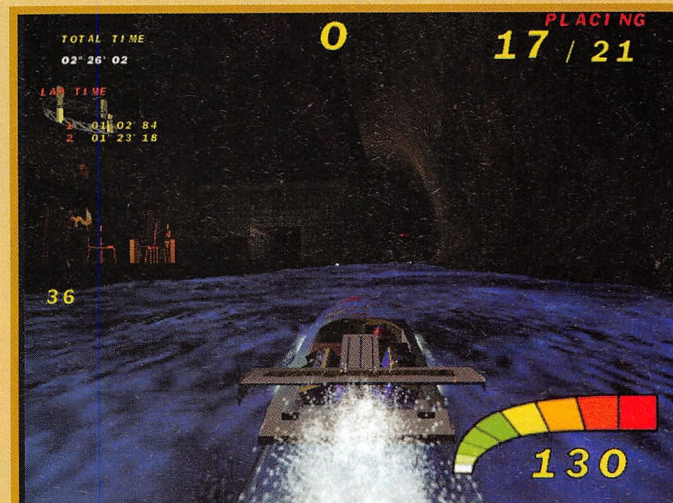
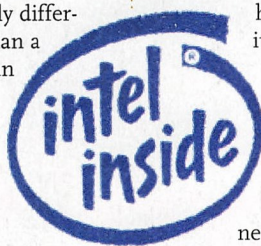
high-powered PC at its heart, it can be sold at a fraction of the cost of a proprietary unit. Secondly, since the heart of an OAA unit is a PC, the entire unit need not be replaced to

change the game that resides on the system. In fact, this is one area that is really being pushed to vendors in OAA's favour. Armed with a set of new cabinet decals, the game itself (on CD), and if needed, a new joystick/button configuration, the unit can undergo minor cosmetic changes and end up a totally new experience the user - even though the basic components are exactly the same!

PC Arcade

The area in which the success of OAA will depend is in the games themselves. Since OAA is opening up the arcade industry to an entire existing set of PC software developers, it is the ability of these developers to adapt to the arcade style of game making that will make or break the OAA. The developers seem up to the task, with dozens of well known developers expressing interest in developing on the new platform. In fact, OAA technology is not far off, with the first wave of OAA units expected to hit our arcades any day now.

March Stepnik



One game in particular, **Thunderboats**, is locally grown. Co-developed by Sydney based Perception (software developers) and GMS (hardware specialists), **Thunderboats** is a racing game in the vein of **Sega Rally** set on water. Near completion, this game is looking hot indeed, and is the first of many OAA based games that Perception/GMS plan to release. With companies like Perception already producing arcade quality titles using the OAA, it seems Intel may succeed in reshaping the arcade industry.

Next month:

We'll be taking a close look at **Thunderboats**, plus a company profile on this newest Australian gameco.

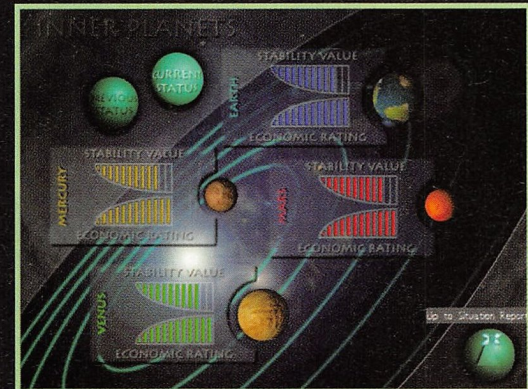
XENOCRACY

THE ULTIMATE SOLAR WAR



XENOCRACY

The year is 10,600 of the Common Era and mankind has colonised space. The future of the solar system hangs in the balance as years of bitter conflict between the four planetary super powers heads toward a finale of catastrophic proportions. As Wing Toucher, commander of the United Planet Nations elite peacekeeping force, your mission choice could tip the balance towards restoring the equilibrium or total annihilation.



The most ambitious deep space and planet surface shoot-em-up ever created!

Key Features

- Ø 3 modes of play : arcade, simulation or on line
- Ø Missions created randomly over more than 70 different locations
- Ø Out of this world ships and weapons to select and fight against
 - Ø A complex optional resource and management system
 - Ø A unique user definable head-up-display option
- Ø State of the art technology with 3D accelerator cards, 3D sound, DirectX 5
- Ø On-line gaming : Local Internet - 8- player death-match option

XENOCRACY boasts all of the 'must have' elements of a classic action space game with the addition of strategic decision making and random mission generation which increases the depth and variety of the gameplay.

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STATE of PLAY

When's it coming out? What's good about it? What's it like? What's new? What's late? What sucks? The answers are here, in the State of Play

Adventure/RPG

David Wildgoose

Perhaps the most significant development in both the Adventure and RPG genres, evident in the many of the games to be released before the end of the year, is the push toward real-time, 1st-person 3D graphics. As to whether this is a good thing, I haven't yet made up my mind (although I know I wouldn't like to see every game become 1st-person 3D - it'd be crushingly dull). Nevertheless, many traditional adventurers are expressing concern over the trend. Why? Because there is a disturbing tendency among developers (or, more likely, their publishers) to equate 3D graphics with action gaming.

Let's look at some past examples of this style of game - RPGs, for example, like



Daggerfall, *Lands Of Lore 2*, even *Ultima Underworld*. They all have 3D graphics, all have heavy action elements, all have real-time combat. Fine games they may well be, yet unsurprisingly in each case combat was the weak point. Their saving grace was that you only had to control one character - a party of six or eight people would clearly have been unworkable. I ought to mention that *Might & Magic VI* makes a decent attempt at a compromise between real-time action and turn-based strategy, and in doing so shows a potential way forward.

Adventures haven't been left untouched either. Whether it's combat (as in *Realms Of The Haunting*) or timed puzzles (as in *Atlantis* or the *Tex Murphy* series), 3D in adventure games has inevitably meant the introduction of action elements. To hammer the point home, Sierra's forthcoming *King's Quest 8* will feature 3D graphics as well as hand-to-hand combat. In fact, I can only think of one game - Gremlin's *Normality* - in which the use of a real-time 3D engine hasn't automatically seen the inclusion of at least a few reflex-based puzzles.

The formula, "3D equals Action", stems from the success of *Quake* and *Tomb Raider*. Behind the push toward 3D is therefore the idea that this somehow guarantees success. Once game developers realise that such thinking is flawed, we will hopefully begin to see 3D games that don't rely upon an itchy trigger finger or dexterous keyboard skills. But I won't hold my breath.

Action

George Argy

There have been more action game announcements this month than you can poke a big, shiny BFG at! For those of us who were confused enough about Raven's announcement that *Heretic II* was coming out and that *Hexen* was a completely different game, Interplay has announced that *Descent III* is coming out - and it's not *Descent Freespace*! It could have been the corridor shooter overkill with *Forsaken* in the mix, but *Descent III* promises outdoor and indoor environments while *Freespace* is essentially a space sim. Can't wait either way.

id have announced a new mission pack for *Quake II* called *Ground Zero* which should be out by the time you read this.



It's been developed by Rogue, the guys who did the *Dissolution of Eternity* expansion pack for *Quake*, and it's looking mighty tasty.

Starsiege Tribes is a hot looking first person shooter set in worlds that are as big as any flight sim's, with indoor and outdoor areas. The designers are focusing on Tribes being primarily a networked game over a LAN or the net, with the emphasis on organised teamplay, meaning tactics and strategy are going to be much more important. There's even going to be a commander screen that will let you control your troops from afar, Herr General.

A rather more interesting take on the first-person shooter is a game called *Seed*. Under development by Humankind, *Seed* takes the importance of lighting in a game to the extreme by basing the entire gameplay on lighting. Some monsters will be colour blind and only see you under a certain coloured light, other monsters are only visible by their shadows, still others will have the ability to suck light out of rooms. It all sounds very interesting, with a great storyline to boot.

Those retro freaks out there will be happy, nay, ecstatic, to learn that *Doom Legacy*, the wicked *Doom* rehash project, is up to version 1.2. The most important addition is the support for 32-player deathmatch! It's *Doom*, it's free, it's better and you should stop reading this and download it now from <http://www.frag.com/doomlegacy/>

Strategy

Peter Sharpe

It's great news on the **Total Annihilation** front of late with the arrival of an excellent expansion pack. Gamers should be wondering what's up with **Total Annihilation 2**? Instead of a fully fledged sequel, Cavedog are releasing a bizarre sounding fantasy flavoured Total Annihilation game later this year named **Total Annihilation: Kingdoms**. TA2 is officially on the backburner until next year. Does this delay have anything to do with Chris Taylor's departure from the TA scene? Let's hope Cavedog keeps things on track minus the guru. Another game with a case of next year is **Age of Empires 2**. Apparently the delay is the usual "we just want to make sure we can make it the best ever" type reason. Fair enough we say.



The RTS evolution continues with MicroProse's **Mech Commander**. Set in FASA's Mech universe the word on this tactical top down warfare bash is that things are shaping up very nicely. It might be real time, but extensive controls of each Mech's weapon systems should banish any criticisms of RTS games being just simplistic clickfests. The main problem is the demo's modem busting 140 Mb size. If anyone out there in reader land attempts the download on their 28.8/33.6 consider yourself an honorary Freak of the Month. Futuristic warfare is a common theme of late, with news that the much rumoured **Warhammer 40,000: Chaos Gate** is definitely going to make an appearance courtesy of SSI. A bit short on details at this stage, with the only info being gameplay will be turn based, squad level combat. Hopefully it's going to have better multiplayer support in the form of an official player matching service as this feature has been sorely lacking in past Warhammer titles.

Talonsoft recently announced that the Battleground series of games was all wrapped up. Just to show email campaigns can and do work (plus the unpleasant thought of people who re-enact musket battles being angry at you) one more **Civil War Battleground** game will make an appearance. Expect to see **Battleground 9: Chickamauga**, later this year. Best patch of the month goes to Bungee's latest updating of **Myth** to v1.3. Visit www.bungee.net and open Myth to extra units, maps and even the adjustment of real world physics, all changes remaining compatible with multiplayer games. What a beaut!

Sims

Maj. Ian Lindgren

It's E3 time again as I write this column, so in the next issue Ben will have a complete update of what's hot and what's not, and what might never be! Whatever the case, October is shaping up to be a good month; read on and find out why!

Activision's **Fighter Squadron** is still planned for release in September, but hot on its heels are two products in October. Microsoft's **Spitfire** and MicroProse's **European Air War**. This WWII sim has been confirmed to support force-feedback joysticks and this promises great action. The game's key features will be 20 fully realistic aircraft models, pre-defined and custom-built historically representative missions including bomber intercepts, bomber



escort, ground support and fighter sweeps. Hot off the press is news that Psynosis will unveil a dogfight sim called **Nations - Fighter Command** at E3. Tell us more on your return Ben!

Empire have two games due for release in October, the first is **MiG Alley** with you piloting a F86 Sabre, F84 Thunderjet, F80 Shooting Star, P51 Mustang or MiG 15. A dynamic campaign is promised with a variety of missions ranging from dogfight action to the destruction of enemy lines of communication and supply.

The other Empire game is **Apache Havoc**, a helicopter sim where gameplay is based on two or more users going head to head in a US Apache against the mighty Russian Havoc. Apparently the terrain is very rugged and is smothered with forests, roads, rivers and electricity pylons. We need more of this to challenge **Longbow 2**! I'll have a beta by next month and tell you more.

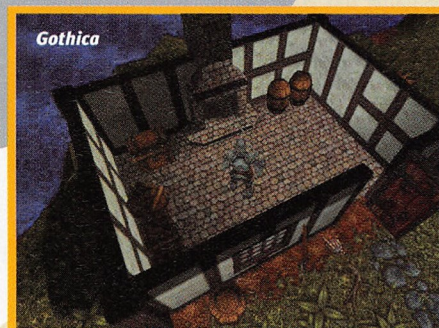
SSI are building a new naval simulation called **Fighting Steel**, once again planned for release in October. The game focusses on the major naval gunnery battles from 1939 through to 1945. Rotating turrets, the impact of incoming rounds, starshells, smoke, searchlights and real time action. Watch the loss of HMS Hood, and sink the Bismark!

Lastly, be aware that **M1 Tank Platoon 2** has a patch, and Sierra confirm that two games will be revitalised in September/October with the release of **Red Baron - The Great War** and **Pro Pilot 99**. More detail on these to follow.

Online

Gareth Jones

It seems that almost every column I write on the online scene will include something about **Ultima Online**, so let's get that out of the way first, shall we? For those that haven't become frustrated and stopped playing because of bad pings, server down-times, and the inherent problems of loser 12 year olds with no concept of Role Playing, Origin have made changes once again to the way things work. It's complicated, so for a full run down on the situation head to <http://update.owo.com/repfaq/index.html>, though there's no guarantee that things won't have changed again by the time this goes to print. In essence, OSI have implemented a 'reputation system' whereby



colours denote the player's status, either law-abiding, criminal, murderer, and so on. PK'ing will still be a function of the system, and guild wars are likely to be commonplace, but it's another step in the right direction.

Next up, and of no small importance to online gamers is the news that **ICQ** may be sold to America On-Line (AOL) for around \$US300 million. Representatives from Mirabilis have yet to confirm the sale, but there does seem to be at least a grain of truth to the rumour. The full news story can be found at http://www.globes.co.il/cgi-bin/Serve_Arena/pages/English/1.2.1.1. Please note that it doesn't say anything about possible new charges for the up-until-now free service from AOL, but bank on it being a very likely option. It was always a matter of time, but still it's sad that this invaluable tool isn't likely to be free for much longer.

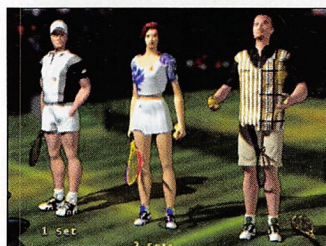
Lastly, and an interesting take on the online RPG genre is **Gothica**. With a fully featured single player mode and very pretty 3D enhanced graphics, this could be a very impressive title. Add to this the ability to set up customised servers (a'la Quake/Q2/Unreal/etc) with up to 12 players (or maybe more) playing either co-op or in a variety of competitive ways, and you should be getting excited. The game doesn't have a publisher as yet, but the way this is looking it shouldn't be too long before someone snaps it up.

Game, Net & Match

Category Sports
Players 1-TBA
Publisher Blue Byte
Available 3rd Quarter '98

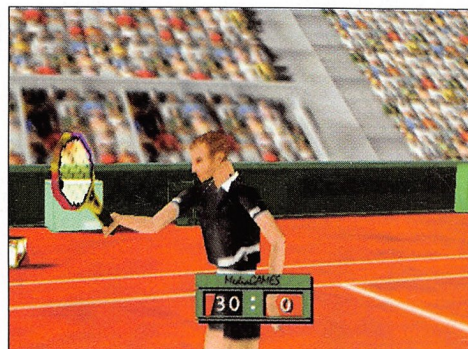
The golden days of tennis were back when John MacEnroe at the drop of a hat would lose it big time and come within a whisker of blowing a blood vessel and murdering a referee in the center court of Wimbledon. Game, Net & Match might not let you leap over the net screaming and frothing in somebody's face but it's about to go where no PC tennis game has gone before, into the realm of 3D acceleration.

While 3D accelerated tennis sounds like a joke told over beer



and pretzels, it looks darn good with textured polygon players volleying, back-spinning and performing all the expected tennis hijinks. 100 female and male AI opponents and multiple tournament/season modes would normally keep the most tennisholic gamer occupied but it's '98 and if golf can join the online multi-play-

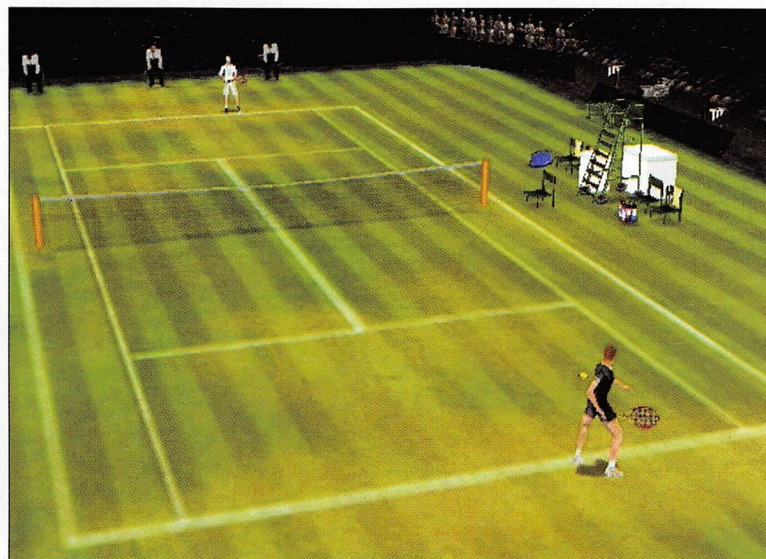
Yeah, sure it looks very pretty, and it's got heaps of detailed players/personalities... but it's really just Pong, isn't it?



er revolution there seems little reason for tennis to be left out in the 'single player only' void. Blue Byte

Software will be maintaining an Internet based server that will host ranked matches for players from all over the world. Geez, if your friends and family thought you were a computer geek now, wait 'til they catch you playing online tennis at four in the morning.

Our demo version didn't go far beyond practising against a ball machine, and admiring some smooth player animations, but nevertheless we were quite impressed. We'll serve up a review when the full version bounces into Powerplay H.Q.



War Games

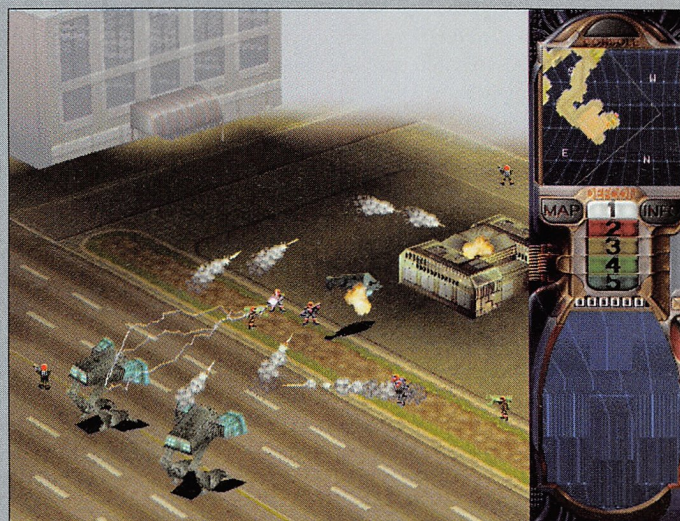
Category RTS
Players 1-TBA
Publisher MGM Interactive
Available July

Twenty years after cute little Matthew Broderick saved the world from the super defense computer that went insane, he's back - and so is WOPR (the aforementioned computer). In the 1983 seminal hacker movie 'War Games', David Lightman (Broderick) broke into one of the NORAD computers and set off a series of events that almost resulted in a full scale nuclear war. The game begins with the premise that after the whole thing died down he was recruited into the ranks of the American defense forces to work with the very same computer system.

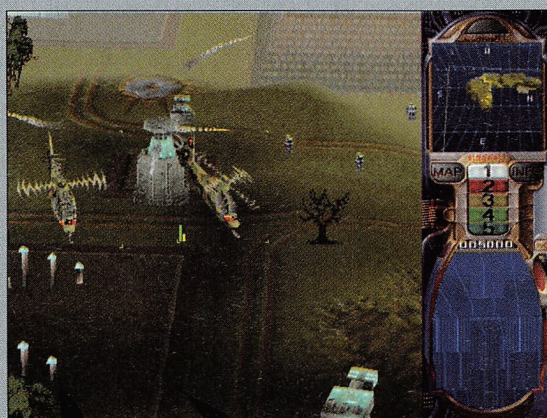
Once again, WOPR (War Operations Planned Response) has a taste for war simulations, and - yes,

you guessed it - it wants "to play a game" again. You can play as either NORAD command or as WOPR itself in this RTS game, and it does look a lot like a fairly standard RTS albeit with a few War Games style additions.

Rather than go and harvest Tiberium, in War Games you can use 'hacker' units to infiltrate buildings and 'harvest' money by breaking into computer systems. Also, it's not just a straight 'build up your troops and send them in' approach



"He's intelligent, but an under achiever; alienated from his parents, has few friends. Classic case for recruitment by the Soviets" - Nigan, War games



that's required either. Because you're going to be dealing with the possibility of a full scale nuclear war, one side of the interface has indicators of the current DEFCON status (from 5 to 1, with 1 being war). It's not really clear as to why, but the DEFCON status will

upgrade itself after certain increments of time unless you engage the enemy, and if you leave it too long then nuclear weapons will be launched at your base. With the scenarios for the missions penned by the producer and director of the movie, and a true 3D world that allows for a user directed viewpoint and true 3D units, there might just be enough of merit in this to make it a worthwhile RTS game, but only time will tell.

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Shadowman

An intelligent, mature and very dark game designed for mature gamers who want more than cheap thrills.

Category Adult Adventure
Players 1
Publisher Acclaim/Iguana
Available Xmas '98

The truth is though, there really aren't any 'adult' games. Sex is virtually non-existent in games, and arguing that excessive violence equals an adult game is a great way of demonstrating no real affinity with reality.

Shadowman is an adult game. There is no sex, and the violence is no more extraordinary than in any other game, but there's still no mistaking it; Shadowman is not for kids.

Dark ambience

Dark and sinister storylines are nothing new in games - far from it. But aside from the flashy intro and gothic packaging, you rarely feel like you're in the world of death that was intended. Dark graphics do not make a dark game. What's needed is quality narrative that keeps you hanging, truly novel-quality plot and characters and settings that do it all justice.

The problem with doing a totally adult game is that it challenges the marketing foundation whereby it is presumed most buyers of games are under 18. Developers are discouraged from doing anything but mass market games and creativity is being stifled as a result. Not at Iguana. I recently visited their HQ in Leeds and was greatly impressed by the dedication to the cause the team shows. Glancing over production notes, many sections were crossed out completely, with a note "make it more f@#\$ed up" scrawled alongside.

Comic origins

Shadowman the game is based on the mature comic series by Valiant Heroes. Staying faithful to the comic's integrity has been relatively easy



for the Iguana team.

Shadowman - the comic and the game, explores the darker sides of the human psyche and regularly confronts common beliefs with dark, hellish alternatives.

The game's 3D world is designed for Direct3D and you play Mike LeRoi, a hired assassin operating in modern day New Orleans. A rough and tumble life for Mike, but it all gets weird fast when Nettie the voodoo sorceress implants the Shadowmask in his chest. Way to ruin a perfectly good day...

Apocalyptic

It is revealed that Nettie has had a prophetic dream foreseeing the Apocalypse. She had recruited an unwilling Mike to travel to the Deadside, where he must make his way to the Asylum; the corner of hell where killers go when they die. Five serial killers have domains in the Asylum and the simple premise is for Mike to



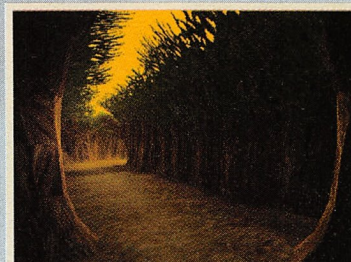
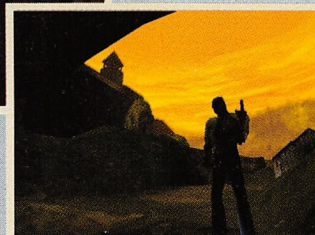
No post-apocalyptic doomsday scenarios here, this is Hell baby! Throw in some "voodoo black magic" and five serial killers and you've got one seriously dark game

find and kill each in order to save the world as we know it. Each is wildly different and all are genuinely psychotic looking.

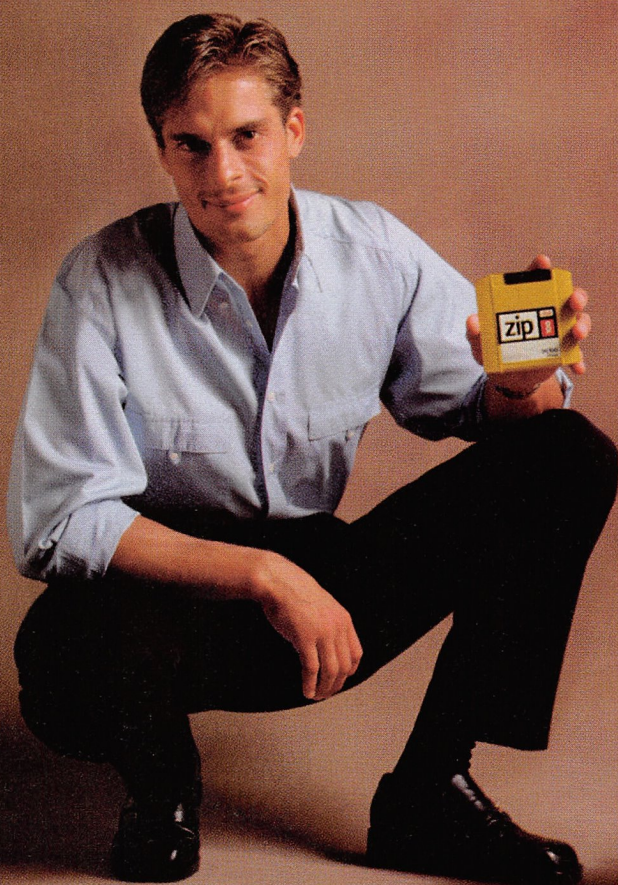
Banned?

Shadowman may just be out for Xmas this year, but don't bet on it. This game will run very close to the Office of Film and Literature Classification's guidelines. We need a good test case, and this could be the one that sets the gaming world alight.

Ben Mansill



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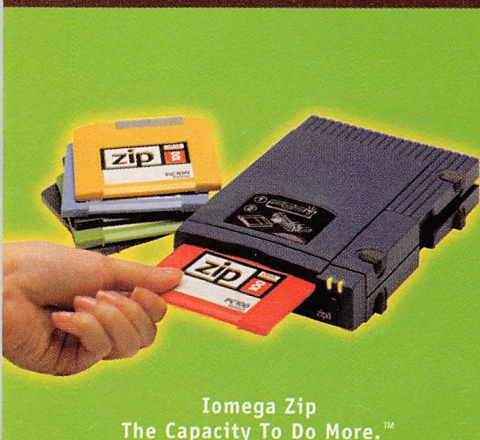
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Force Commander

Category RTS
Players 1-8
Publisher LucasArts
Available Christmas-ish '98

Star Wars fans, it is said, will buy anything with the Star Wars name and logo attached to it - a theory strongly tested with the execrable Star Wars Monopoly. In terms of games based on the Star Wars universe, however, LucasArts have always done a great job even though they have often favoured using an already established genre.

The Last Genre

The X-Wing series pushed its way into a crowded genre, and deservedly made a name for itself as one of the top quality space combat games. Dark Forces, despite a rather unconvincing start, has also earned deserved kudos for Jedi Knight and the Mysteries of the Sith add-on pack.

If there's one genre even more clogged with wannabes than First Person games, it has to be the Real Time Strategy genre and it's sure to set alarm bells ringing in all but the most optimistic Star Wars fans when you hear that a SW RTS game is in the works.



It's got the classic look of a bog-standard RTS game, but with LucasArts in the engine room and the Star Wars to play in, it almost has to be great

That old universe

Indications are, however, that Force Commander will be anything but a derivative title. The basic tenets of the game will remain in place, a top down perspective where you build factories and gather resources to build offensive and defensive units, but once again, LucasArts will be tweaking many of the standard facets of the genre as well as imbuing the game with the quintessential Star Wars ethos. There will be two sides to choose from - and yes, you guessed it, that's either the Imperial nasties or the Rebel scum. You're a field commander, safely ensconced in a command centre a couple of clicks away, sending out orders as the battles unfold. The events that do unfold will sometimes be familiar to those who've seen the movies, as the events in the game run parallel to the trilogy, beginning just before the Imperial attack on Alderaan and culminat-

ing at around the same time as Luke's daddy chucked the Emperor down a really big power hole type thingy.

Crush Rebel scum

It's not going to be a straight path through the events of the movies though, many of the battles you'll be fighting will be those from the periphery of the movies, such as the battle for Hoth, on Yavin just before the attack on the Death Star, and so on. In fact, you'll be crushing the Rebel scum or destroying the evil empire on many varied worlds, each of which will suit different types of units.

And there will be over 100 units to choose from, including old favourites like AT-AT and AT-ST walkers, Tauntauns, snowspeeders, speederbikes, as well as the usual array of RTS vehicles and buildings (there's no news yet on whether you can strap high explosives onto Ewoks and send them on suicide runs, but we live in hope).

Resource Management

In a nice twist though, the resources on each planet will be different, requiring different types of gathering and processing. On Tatooine, for example, you'll be gathering water whereas on Kessel it's spice that provides the money/resources for your battles.





True 3D terrain

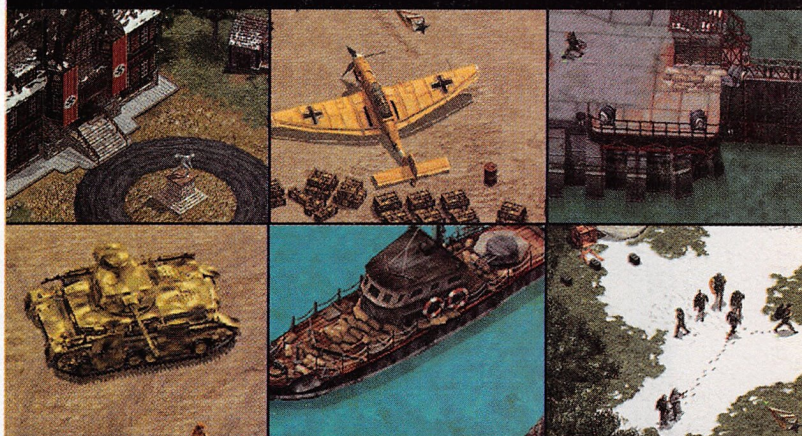
In terms of technology, FC promises to be no slouch. Not only are we talking about true 3D terrain (with advantages to taking the high ground and so on), but 3D units as well, and possibly even a user controlled viewpoint (a'la Myth). To achieve the 3D graphics, there was a price - to play the game you will need to have a 3D accelerator card of some sort,

and the system requirements will be quite high too. However, provided you do have the components to run the game, Force Commander looks as though it might just breathe new life into a dying genre. For Star Wars fans, or just those who enjoy well made computer games, this is almost definitely one to put on the Christmas list. More soon.

Gareth Jones



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Quest for Glory 5

Category RPG/Adventure

Players 1-3

Publisher Sierra

Available Late '98

This is the game that was brought back from the dead by fans of the Quest for Glory series. Since 1989, Lori Anne and Corey Cole have been responsible for the QG games, but when QG4 was released a couple of years ago it was a decidedly buggy affair, and just plainly not up to the standard of the previous games.

Consequently, gamers everywhere turned their backs on the game and the resultant lack of decent sales figures caused the bigwigs at Sierra to decide to junk the final game in the series.

Thus the gamers spake

However, a deluge of emails and online petitions sent to Sierra caused them to rethink, once again, their stance towards the QG series. 'Ahoy, there might be money to be made here after all', the suits may have been thinking, but whatever the reason, QG5 was back, and now finally, it's almost ready to be released.

In terms of graphics, although we are talking about 3D figures

times. Objects like walls, houses, stones and the like can get in the way and it becomes difficult to see your character. So, at times, trying to figure out which direction your character is facing is nigh on impossible, and it just becomes a question of pressing keys until you stumble on the correct way to face to extricate yourself from the situation.

Easy Combat

The combat sequences at this point are a fairly simple affair, with one key for attack, and one for defence. On most occasions, it was just a matter of standing your ground and repeatedly pressing the attack button when an adversary came into range - but complex moves (a'la your console fighting game) aren't really what the experience of a detailed adventure/RPG are about, we would think.

Virtual friends

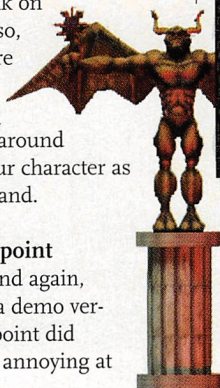
There's no need to go too much into the story, because as with the other QG games, it's fairly open-ended. You choose the path your character takes, whether that is as a wizard or a fighter or a mercenary thief just out for what you can get. We're promised a huge playing area, with a large number of cities to



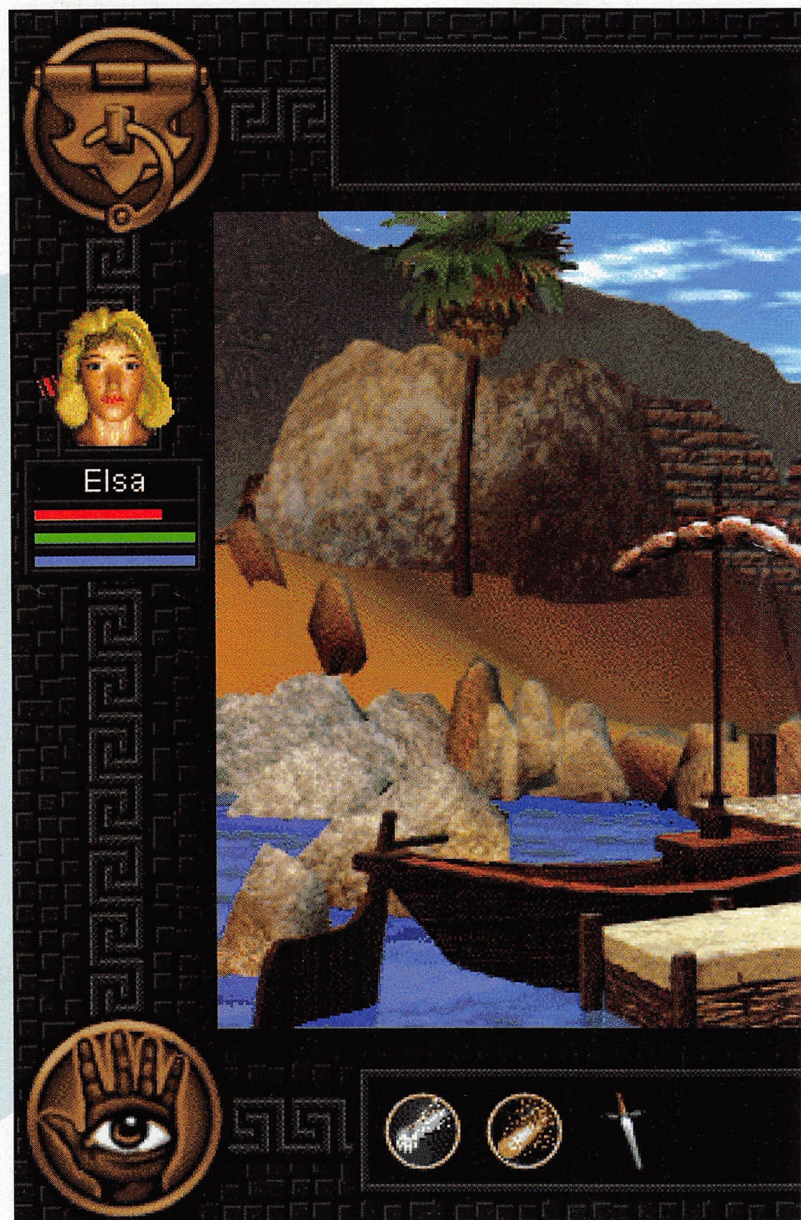
and some very nice backdrops it's nothing jaw-droppingly amazing. This is only a preview, and we're talking about a demonstration version, but the characters do seem to glide over the surface rather than walk on the ground. Also, QG5 will feature a new camera system, which swoops around and follows your character as you travel the land.

Curious Viewpoint

However (and again, this was from a demo version) the viewpoint did become a little annoying at



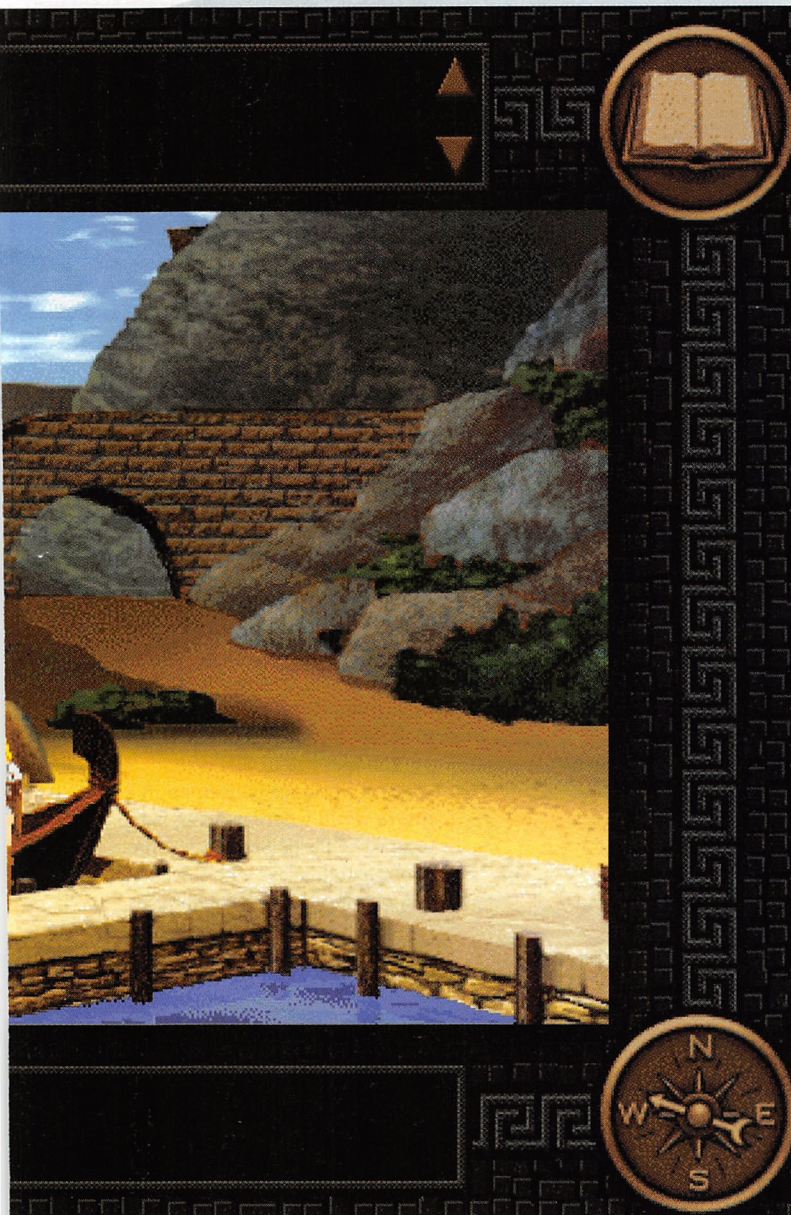
visit and along with the usual type of quests and heroic type activities, we're also told that there will be the opportunity for romance! True to Sierra-style form, we're not talking



about characters getting physically squishy with each other, but depending on which character you choose to play as, there will be opportunities to court and woo other characters, with a view to making the bond everlasting - 'and they strolled hand in hand off into the

One of the most eagerly awaited features will be co-op multiplay, primarily through Sierra's STG's server





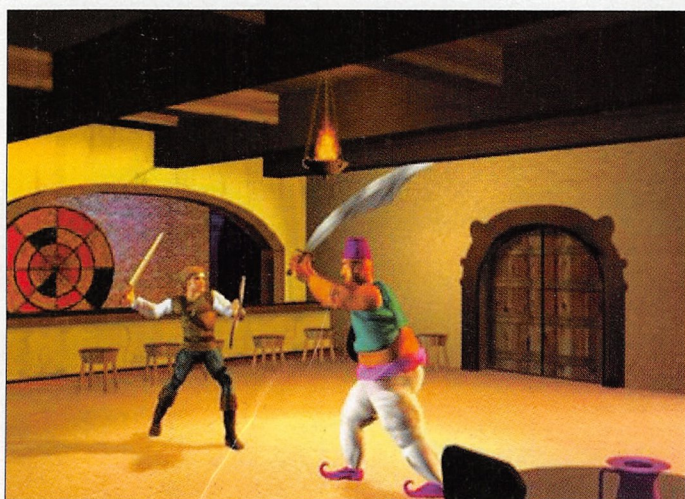
sunset and lived happily ever after' type affair.

Musical Genius

One of the standout facets of the game, along with the mostly open ended adventuring, has to be the musical score. With many adventure type games, music plays a large part in the construction of the atmosphere

around the game, though often we've had to settle for some pretty repetitive and crappy midi files. It's not, perhaps, a crucial component of the gameplay but when done well a musical score adds immeasurably to the experience of playing and the music for QG5 really has been done well - to a professional standard.

Gareth Jones



TACTICS, TERROR, TESTOSTERONE!



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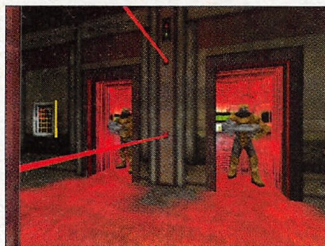
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Sin

Category Action
Players 1-TBA
Publisher Ritual/Activision
Available Sometime

Aside from Unreal, SiN is probably the most hyped 3D shooter out of the Big Five for this year (Daikatana, Prey and Half-Life being the other three). Whether this hype is justified or not will only be revealed once the game is out ('when it's done' is the official launch date), but there are a couple of tidbits floating around that the designers have mentioned in interviews that sound extremely droolworthy.

Ritual Entertainment are banking all their chips on SiN's storyline to differentiate it from



We're promised a truly multi-pathed storyline, which would be a first for a FPA game, and a very interesting direction for the genre to take

the next generation of 3D shooters that will be gracing the gaming shelves in a

few months. Let's face it - while eye-candy will do the magic the first time you see it, it's not going to make the game a winner.

The premise in SiN is that you're a freelance policeman in a future world where policing is too expensive. Elexis Sinclair is a pretty but naughty lass who's decided that owning 142 pairs of shoes is not enough - world domination is the next big shopping trip, so it's up to you to stop her. Don't think

Wartorn

Category RTS
Players 1-TBA
Publisher Eyst
Available 3rd Quarter '98

We've brought you news before on this impressive looking game from Australian developers Eyst (previously known as Asylum) who were responsible for the graphical adventure DogDay (PCPP #13; 82%). Because it's a very impressive looking game, and because a representative from the company stopped by the offices a couple of days ago to show us some of the new innovations and tweaks that had been developed, we're going to give you a second look at this exciting project.

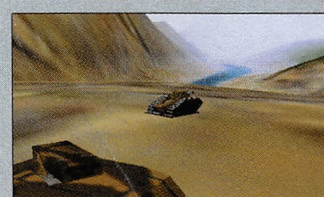
One of the most interesting developments we were shown was the new option to go to full screen mode - and the game really does look great this way. Obviously enough, it's not quite as easy to manage your resources

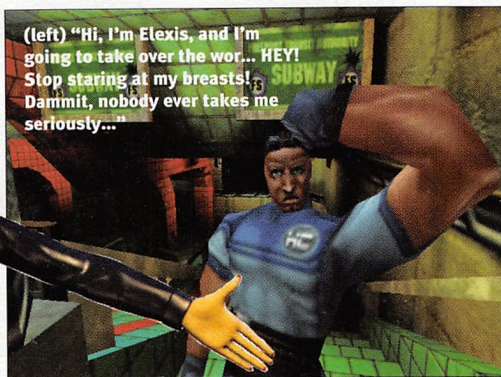


this way, but when in the midst of a large scale battle, full screen mode should look fantastic. Another necessary innovation was the ability to use a free camera that can go anywhere, unlike previously when you were 'tied' to your units. Because of the Myth style engine (though indi-



Already a very impressive game, Wartorn is just getting better as the development process continues





that this means you have to kill a ton-o-badguys and then face Elexis at the end. SiN promises a game where your actions dictate what will happen later on down the track - even to the extent of branching mission structures; a first for 3D shooters.

The other Big Deal is going to be the level of interactivity promised by the designers.

There will be a

range of moving vehicles such as a helicopter, jeep and submarine. You'll be able to interact with civilians floating around, operate machinery and create a lasting impact on your scenery with some nasty weaponry. Basically, if anything looks like it can be operated, spoken to or totally destroyed, it probably can be.

If anyone can pull this off, it's got to be Ritual. The company used to be called Hipnotic, and you may remember they designed Scourge of Armagon, a most excellent Quake expansion pack. At the very least, the levels will be fantastic, as Richard 'Levelord' Gray is at the helm, and his Quake levels are some of the best ever.

George Argy



The game engine is so good that it's generating a deal of overseas interest. Just makes you want to start chanting 'C'mon, Aussie, c'mon' doesn't it?

cations are that Wartorn's engine is much more powerful), you can zoom in and out, as well as rotating the camera in any direction you like.

On the 'it sounds weird, but it might work' front, Eyst are also thinking about including more depth on the resource management side of things. Each factory will require workers, you see, and the more workers in one factory the faster that factory will produce. But the workers won't be automatons, they're human and they need rest - and you'll be able to build



them a rec room, and kit it out with TV's, pool tables, video games and the like just for that purpose.

There's also been some nifty other improvements in the interface, and even though you are often moving through some complex and detailed options, it's all easy and very functional. We were seriously looking forward to this one before, but now we're even more excited about it - more soon.



CONVICTION, COURAGE, CARNAGE!



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Thief: The Dark Project

Category Thief Sim
Players 1-Multi
Publisher Eidos/Looking Glass
Available Late '98

Don't know about you, but every time I hear or see those words - The Dark Project - a frisson of anticipation bristles the hair on my neck.

Partly this is due to the title itself, the mysteriousness and the ambiguity, and partly because it is the game presently under the skilled development of Looking Glass Technologies. Responsible for a string of critically-acclaimed titles no one bought, including action RPGs System Shock and Ultima Underworld, as well as Terra

Nova and Flight Unlimited, LGT possess an almost peerless track record.

The Dark Project is an intriguing game for several reasons. Unlike most action RPGs, success is not a matter of brute force or amassing ever more powerful spells, but with sleight of hand, stealth, deception and assassination. Pursuing a twilight occupation within the sprawling city streets, you have ample opportunity for much stalking, pickpocketing and cat-burglary.

It's a mission-based game, set entirely in a gothic city, with your ultimate goal being the infiltration of a malign religious organisation called the Order of the Hammer. As a thief you will have all kinds of knave-like accessories - lockpicks, garrotes, poisoned arrows, even a nifty sword if your "sneaking through shadows" technique



Looking Glass - often overlooked, and undeservedly so. The Dark Project looks set to change this

goes horribly wrong.

No doubt, it goes without saying that Looking Glass will be supporting 3D acceleration, although at this stage they're undecided as to what form that support will take. It seems OpenGL is the favoured option, however. Currently the tentative release date is for Spring '98, but you may just have to wait until Xmas. Such a wait looks worth it, though.

Thief: The Dark Project, then, is 3D action for the intelligent gamer. And will surely make a mockery of the 'Category' box in our reviews. But you knew that already.

David Wildgoose



Vigilance

Category First Person Action
Players 1-TBA
Publisher Segasoft
Available Late '98 - Early '99

With such auspicious titles as Unreal just released, as well as others like Half-Life, Sin, and possibly even Prey finally looking as though they are nearing completion, you might be excused for thinking 'oh no, not another FPA!'

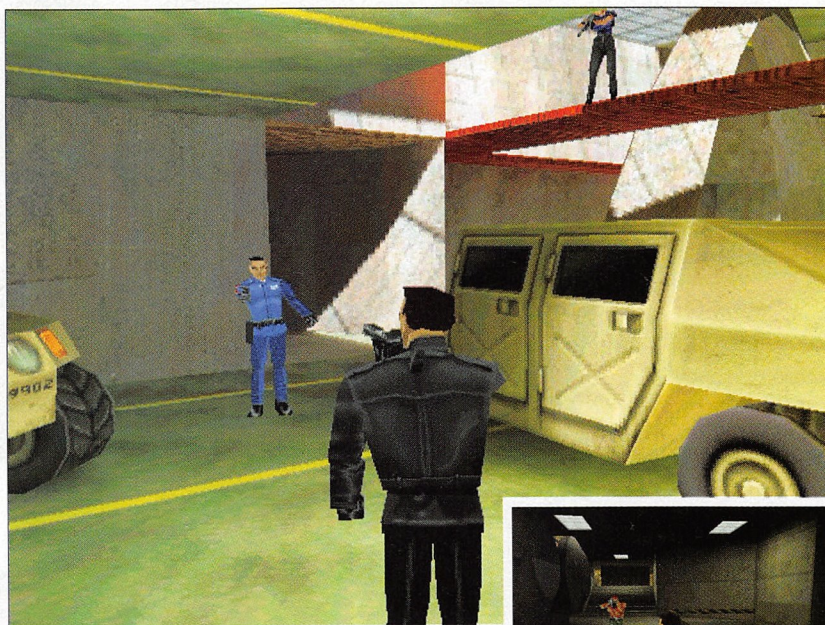
Well, for starters, this isn't really just another FPA. It is a first person perspective game which heavily features action, but it's also more of a character based game, where at the start you select some of the characteristics.

The scenario runs that in the tech-noir future, acts of terrorism are rampant and a task force is created to combat the baddies - and of course, you're a member of that task force, the Special Operations Intelligence Network (or SOIN, for the acronymically inclined). Hence you choose what weapons and armaments to take

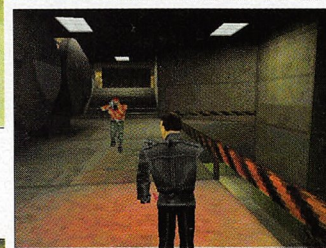
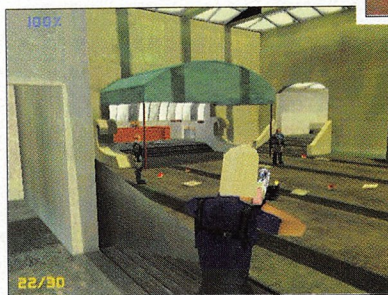
along on your missions, from stealth cloaks and sniper guns, through to your bigass particle cannons and heavy kevlar armour if you're more of a 'kill everything that moves' style player.

It's still fairly early days yet for Vigilance, but it is being designed from the ground up to feature heavily in the deathmatch stakes, which is such an integral part of FPA games. And then there's the game engine itself, developed in part by a group from Sun Microsystems. SegaSoft are talking about doorknobs having around 50 polygons, so you can imagine the detail that goes into the characters.

Obviously, you will need a 3D accelerator card to make the most of the graphical capabilities, but you won't need to have



The trend for hybrid FPA titles is increasing, with strategy playing a much larger part



one, which is a nice touch for the impoverished gamer. As always though, the proof is in the pudding, and when we get our hands on some kind of playable demo, we'll let you know how it's coming along.

Gareth Jones



INTERCEPTOR

Welcome to the Frontier!

In X-COM Interceptor, you take command of an elite force that has been fielded to meet the aliens on their own turf - the depths of space. This time, you'll be engaging your alien foes from the cockpit of a cutting-edge space fighter, fighting ship-to-ship as you protect Earth's corporations and X-COM installations. As X-COM's commander in the Frontier, it's up to you to guide the research of alien weapons and technology in the hopes of improving your own technology and discovering the reason for the ever-increasing alien activity - before it's too late.



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Now that you've researched the Doppelganger Missile Launcher from the alien ship, you can equip your fighters with powerful alien technology and improve your odds.



With this new arsenal, the tide is turning. The aliens are retreating to their cozy little black hole. But what will they plan next? Better find out... before they come back for you.



Available mid July '98

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CD-ROM

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Grim Fandango

Category Adventure
Players 1
Publisher LucasArts
Available Late '98

In Western culture, for the most part, death is a time of great sadness and mourning for those who survive. As macabre as it may sound to our limited perspectives, in other cultures death is held in a much different regard.

Coffin parties

The Mexican celebration of the 'Day of the Dead' (Los Dias de los Muertos) occurs every November when the Monarch butterflies return to the country,



and good enough to be a huge hit. You take on the role of Manuel 'Manny' Calavera, one of the middlemen whose duty it is to escort the newly deceased from the land of the living to the plane of the dead.

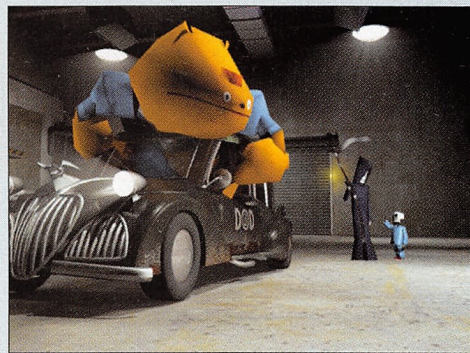
Mexican Mythology

According to Mexican mythology, the path that the dead travel through on their way to their final resting place takes four years to traverse (and Manny's 'path' is to work as a travel agent for the newly dead for four years, to cite an example). However, life (or death, as the case may be) isn't easy in purgatory, and Manny is in competition with other 'travel agents' to secure the patronage

of the newly deceased, and these other agents put the shysters and hustlers from Glengarry Glen Ross to shame. So, in an effort to get a step ahead of his competition Manny (i.e. you) steals a lead from one of his competitors which puts the underworld hierarchy in a spin, and unwittingly Manny discovers a conspiracy in the land of the dead. Thus begins your adventure, a grand and sweeping tale which follows Manny as he travels his path to eternal rest for four years.

Surreal and trippy

As you can see from the screenshots, Grim Fandango looks suitably surreal and trippy (as well as featuring gorgeously drawn figures) that depict a world of magic realism laced with dollops of noir-style entanglements, and going by the LucasArts adventure game pedigree (Day of the Tentacle, The Monkey Island series, Sam and Max, etc) it should be eminently playable too. One of the greatest criticisms of Full Throttle, another from



"But I didn't have any of the Salmon Mousse!"

the LucasArts adventure game stable, was that it was too short, but not so with GF.

And Big

With around 90 locations to travel to, and more than 50 characters to meet and interact with, along with a non-linear storyline, Grim Fandango should have enough content to keep many a gamer puzzling away for weeks and weeks. It looks to have it all, really; the LucasArts pedigree, fantastically twisted graphics, stylish and mature content (which isn't a euphemism for rude bits), an engaging and entertaining storyline, and more than a smattering of surreal goings on to boot.

Gareth Jones



and tradition holds that the butterflies contain the spirits of the dead who are back for two days to visit the living. During the festival, people dress up as skeletons, ghouls and so on (as with Halloween), and parade through town with open coffins containing effigies of dead relatives, with vendors throwing fruit, candies, and flowers into the coffins as a mark of respect.

Dead Mexicans

It might not seem like the most natural leap in the world, but Tim Schafer from LucasArts (whose past credits include Full Throttle) was intrigued enough to want to create an adventure game based around the concept, and whether you are already a fan of the adventure style game or not, Grim Fandango looks interesting



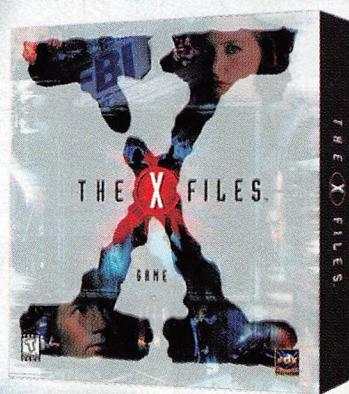
SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

16MB RAM.

100MB FREE HARD DRIVE SPACE.

A HEALTHY DOSE OF

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Alpha Centauri

Category Turn based Strategy
Players 1-TBA
Publisher Origin/Firaxis
Available TBA

There's only a handful of people that qualify for the tag of 'gaming legend'. John Carmack, David Braben, David Perry, Chris Roberts, Richard Garriott, Andy Hollis, Peter Molyneux, and perhaps a couple more.

The name Sid Meier is certainly one to feature prominently on the list, perhaps even predominantly - creator of F15 Strike Eagle, Silent Service, Pirates, F19 Stealth Fighter, Railroad Tycoon, and of course, the game that features highly on just about everybody's all time favourites list; Civilization. Can the man do no wrong?

Sid game, good game

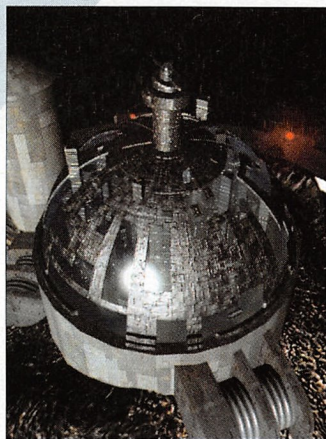
His departure from the company he started back in 1982, MicroProse, to join another start-up company (Firaxis software, comprised mostly of ex-MicroProse staffers) startled many fans. However, Gettysburg (92% PCPP #20), the first game from Sid and the team at Firaxis, bore all the hallmarks of a classic Meier effort; a high level of professionalism, oodles of class, and plenty of playability and replayability. The next offering, Alpha Centauri, looks set to be even better, and (in a good way) bears more than a passing resemblance to Civilization.

In fact, after taking a look through the features of the game you would be excused for thinking of the game as 'Civilization in space'. To begin with, the plot follows on (sort of) from the end of Civilization. The space race has resulted in a long range spaceship being launched towards Alpha Centauri.

It's a long journey though, and along the way ideological conflicts arise between the passengers. When a hospitable planet is discovered orbiting Alpha Centauri, it's decided to land and colonise the planet, but the conflict between the passengers results in a 7-way factional split, and so the battle for supremacy on the planet commences.

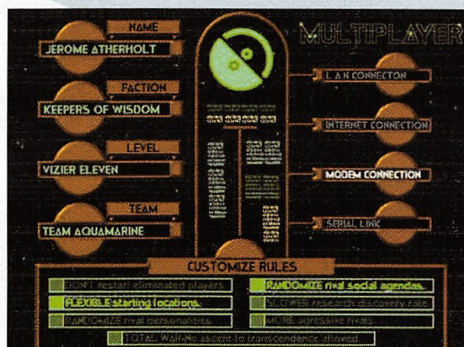


The comparisons between this and Civilization are bound to come thick and fast. Like Warcraft/Starcraft, it's (almost) Civ in Space



Civ in space

As with Civ, the environment will be randomly generated each time you play, and the general idea of the game will be to tame your environment, build up a number of colonies, and destroy the other factions. But it's not going to be a simple and straightforward affair. As with Civ, there will be a diverse technical tree for you to research, with different



decisions affecting the way your community develops.

You could concentrate on advanced artificial intelligence to create viruses to infiltrate and destroy enemy technology, or concentrate on the more straightforward 'big guns and lots of them' approach, or even pursue the path to community prosperity and enlightenment, eschewing conflict altogether (and hoping that no-one comes to pick on you).

The path to enlightenment is a valid research option, along the same lines as the space race from Civ - if you evolve to the 'next level of humanity' before anyone else does then you win, so full scale eradication of the other factions isn't necessarily required. However, should you wish to take the path of conflict,

then there will be plenty to keep you occupied as well. A variety of offensive and defensive unit types will be available, with a high level of customisability too, because you will be able to kit out your troops with your technical advances.

Multi-faceted

One of the most encouraging aspects of the game is that it will be multiplayable out of the box, it will be turn based (though the different players, AI or human, will all take their turns at the same time), and you will be able to exercise a much higher level of control over your troops than has been the tradition, with patrols, waypoints, and the like all being available.

Other than that, it's still fairly early days in the development of Alpha Centauri, and Firaxis aren't all that forthcoming with more detailed information about the game. Rest assured though, this is one we shall be watching very closely, and as we find out more we'll let you know.

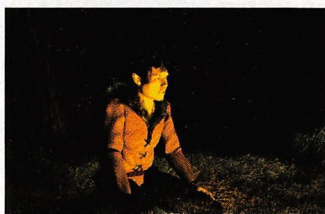
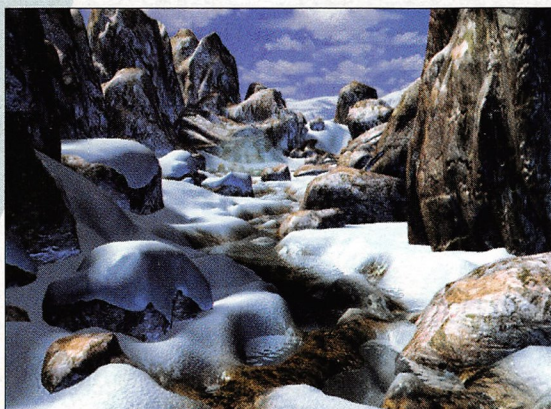
Lands of Lore III

Category RPG
Players 1
Publisher Westwood
Available November '98

As much as I liked Lands of Lore 2 last year, I'll be the first to admit that it did alienate many of the hardcore RPG players who made the first in the series such a success. For the third game, Westwood are promising what seems to be a mixture of the best both titles had to offer. LoL3 will remain a solo experience - in the dual terms of playing just one character and there being no multi-player options - and retain the real-time 3D and first-person perspective featured in LoL2. Utilising Westwood's own newly-developed voxel-based graphics engine, LoL3 will support 3D accelerators and be capable of creating a totally 3D world - making it somewhat of a rarity in the

RPG genre. They have also discovered SVGA. Heavens!

It will be possible for you to customise skills and abilities throughout the game by gaining membership of one of the numerous guilds. This kind of control



Could this be the game that brings people back to the RPG genre en masse? Put LoL3 up high on your "games-to-look-out-for" list

over your character's experience and direction was sorely missing from the second game.

Perhaps the most impressive aspect is that Westwood are emphasising the strength of the game's story and the believable world they have created. According to Westwood executive vice-president Louis Castle, "I think story is one of the most important

parts of any game. We're looking toward strong narrative and compelling human motivations to really draw you into the Lands of Lore world. Cities can't be deserted. They need to be populated with characters that feel real. Animals can't always try to eat you and real people don't spend their days hacking and slashing through dank dungeons for no apparent reason."

Amen to that.

David Wildgoose

Commando: Behind enemy lines

Category RTS (with a twist)
Players 1-TBA
Publisher Eidos
Available 3rd Quarter '98

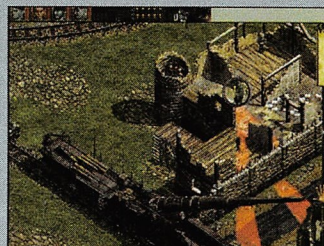
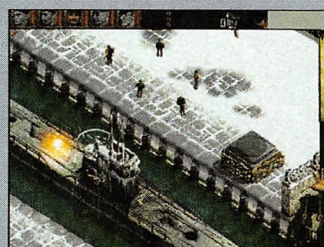
This is a bad game. A very very bad game. A truly nasty game. Not because it's bad, just the opposite in fact. Commando's is a bloody brilliant, top quality, incredibly addictive real time strategy game (and I don't mean that in a bad way). It's bad because this is only a 1/2 page preview, and I got in trouble for playing it for like 4 straight hours when I was supposed to be doing lots of other working type stuff. Dammit, I even kept playing on a Friday afternoon when company sponsored drinkies were available, and if that isn't a ringing endorsement then I don't know what is.

It's set in WW2, and your task is to command a group of commandos through a number of missions against those nasty old Nazi's. Depending upon the

mission, you'll have between 3 and 6 men to command, each with different abilities, like a sapper, frogman, marine, spy, etc. Each commando has special abilities, and each is essential to the mission. It's all in real time, and moves from slow paced strategic manoeuvrings to fast paced rushes when you make your move against the guards, and the game is so well crafted that everything just falls into place perfectly. It's hard though, and you will find yourself trying one approach and then reloading if it doesn't work. It's nice



that there seems to be more than one way to do things, so it's not just a question of finding the correct approach and then waltzing through. Clicking on enemies will show you their line of sight, and you need to watch them for a while to see where their patrol takes them, so you know when the right time is to move. It's really quite cool, and might just prove to be one of those games that comes with little promotion and blather but turns out to be a hit purely because of gameplay.



A couple of months back we took a brief look and said "Oh yeah, doesn't look too bad". After playing it we can't wait for the full version

THE SCORE

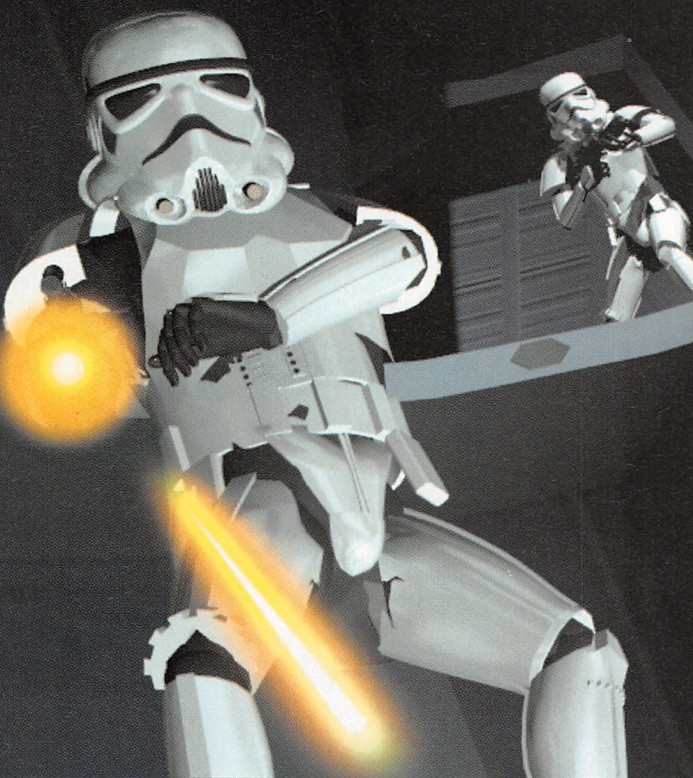
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REVIEWS

It's Unreal

There were mixed reaction, here at PowerPlay HQ, when Unreal first arrived. Most of us simply stared at the game, unable to speak, while those less impressed and in greater control of their emotions actually managed utterances. "This is unbelievable", "Ohmigod" and "It's all over for id software" were typically heard comments.

It is that good. Three years of development, with Quake and Quake 2 as the pace-setters, can obviously yield some spectacular results.

Unreal has it all - more than we thought possible, in fact. While it would be easy to rattle on about the graphics - which are categorically the best ever seen in a computer game, we're level-headed professionals and therefore need to be impressed by the gameplay. Here, Unreal is astonishing. You think you're good at Quake? Prepare to be humbled.

Naturally, Unreal is our lead review this month. Turn the page and soak it all up.

Meanwhile, in the catacombs... David gives Might and Magic 6 the mighty thumbs-up. We've

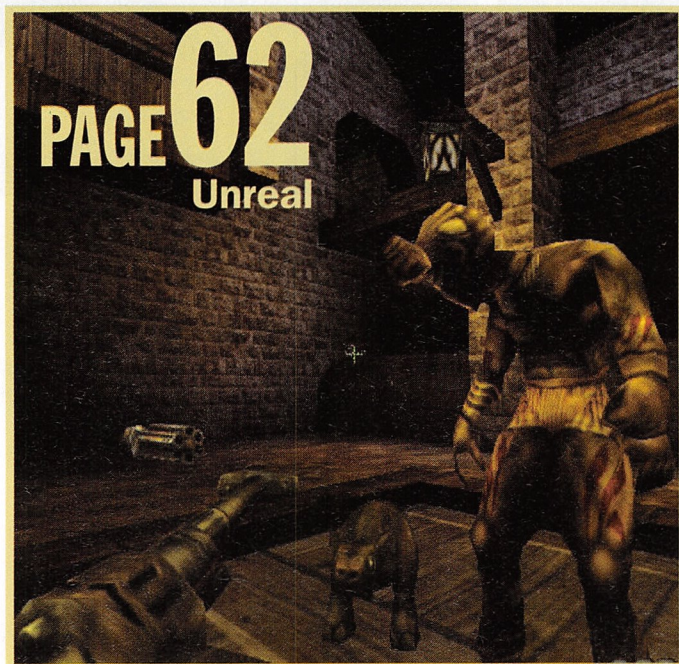
harped on about the dismal state of RPGs for a few months now, but our faith in the genre has been restored, thanks to this most excellent adventure.

Total Annihilation fans - and that's all of us here at PowerPlay - now have the Core Contingency add-on to get into. Cavedog's support for this most brilliant of RTS games has been exemplary. With downloadable units from the internet to this off-the-shelf game-extender, Total Annihilation has most satisfactorily filled the RTS void left by Westwood.

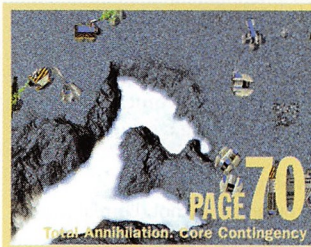
Storming out of the blue and impressing mightily, is Castrol Honda Superbikes. As much as we love Moto Racer, the world has always needed a proper bike sim. This, readers, is the one. It's just a bit hard though, but hey, that's what we'd expect from a sim.

A top month of games - a little short on strategy, but we've got enough 3D action gaming to last quite a while. The Orcish hordes will just have to wait...

Ben Mansill
Editor



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THE PC POWERPLAY SCORING SYSTEM

95%+	PLATINUM The Best. Virtually faultless, reserved for games which cause loss of sleep from thinking of nothing else.
90-94%	GOLD A classic. Either an unquestionable example of superiority within its genre, or a ground breaking game that'll be setting trends.
80-90%	A strong, eminently playable game. Hard to fault and likely to still be on the hard drive in 6 months time.
60-80%	Competant and generally enjoyable. Flaws or mediocrity hold these games back from higher ratings.
40-60%	Average and ordinary. Not bad, not good. Ideal gift
0-40%	Bad, really bad. Boring, shamelessly unoriginal, cheap and horrible

UNREAL

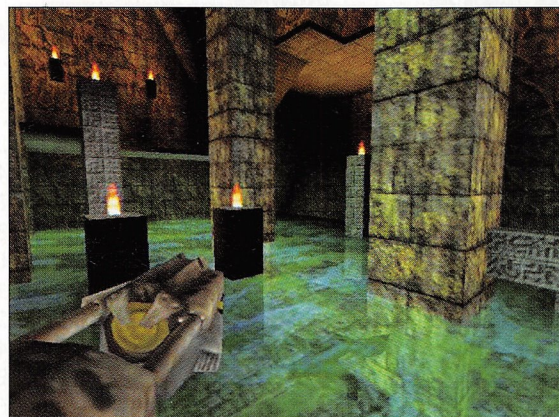
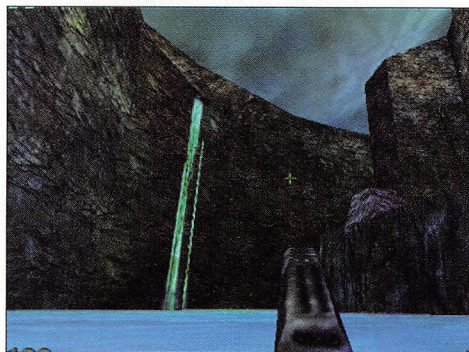
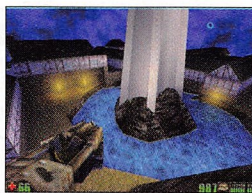
The big unknown is how long Unreal will hold the title, but for the moment, this is the Best Game Ever.

John Carmack must be having nightmares. It's been well over three years in the making and just when everyone thought it was vapourware, like all the other first-person shooters slated for release this year, Unreal has finally been released. Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the next level in gaming...

Involving plot

Believe it or not, Unreal has a storyline and it's one that you constantly think about as you explore your surroundings. You are a prisoner on the Vortex Rikers, a prison vessel that has crashed on an alien planet. Your first task is to get out of your ship and find a way off the alien planet. You start with no weapons, no items and enough health so that a particularly nasty mosquito bite would take you down. When you finally do get off your ship, you encounter a race of creatures called the Nali - six handed poker sharks that lived on the planet in peace, the fools. Of course, they were prime targets for the vicious Skaarj, a warlike race (that look not unlike the Predator) who hunt the Nali for sport. If you feel up to it, you can help the Nali as well as destroying the Skaarj and they will reward you with goodies and secret areas you ordinarily wouldn't find. You can kill them after they do this, of course, because even a peaceful target gives you some practice.

Yes, these are authentic screenshots, taken on a P200, with the game running at a perfectly acceptable framerate



Superb single-player

You're not alone if you have been thinking that all 3D shooters that have been appearing lately are most fun when you get to shoot your mates,

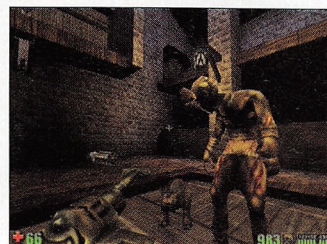
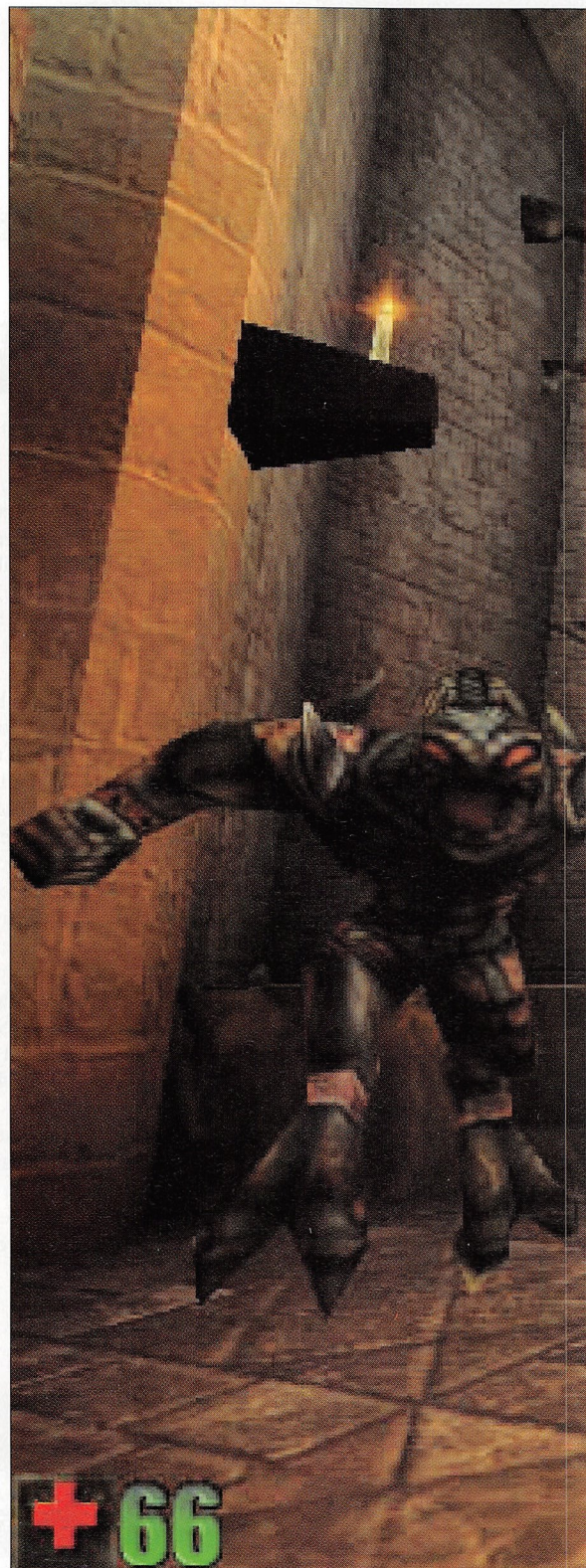


and the single player game was only there so you could test the weaponry on some inane beastie before letting rip on your LAN/Net buddies. Put those thoughts in an early grave, because not since Doom has a game had such an effect on a person. It can be summed up in one word: atmosphere. That all too elusive concept in games that cannot be written with code, atmosphere derives

from many elements in perfect combination designed to suspend your disbelief so totally, that you actually think you are 'really there'. The visual effects mix perfectly with the sound effects, the music comes on in particular situations and is made for the moment, the enemies are intelligent and well placed - I could go on, but I'll use an example to illustrate my point.

Total immersion

You're walking back along a brightly lit corridor after turning off a couple of switches which de-activate a force field. There



were no monsters on the way here, and no doors, so you're not expecting any company on the way back. Still, you tread cautiously because after all, this is an alien and hostile planet and

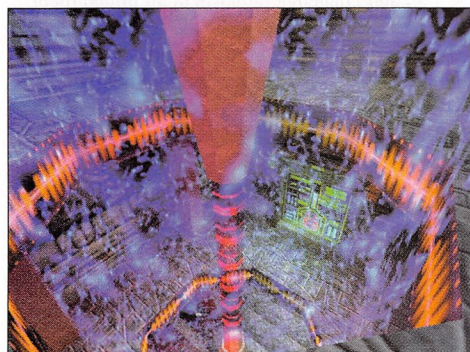


**BEST
game
EVER!**

Shirley, you must be joking?!

Big call, we know. It just happens to be true. While everyone has their favourite game and will defend its qualities to the death, Unreal is the complete package, delivered with an unprecedented level of quality. Gameplay, graphics, sound, design - Unreal is simply the best there's ever been. You may not even like 1st-person action games - not everyone here at PowerPlay does, but Unreal transcends genre barriers because it isn't merely a little bit better than anything we've seen before, but is of a completely new generation, one which we honestly didn't expect to see for another couple of years. It is an astounding piece of work, and I dare any sceptic to at least watch it being played for a couple of minutes and not agree.

Ben Mansill
Editor



And you thought the lighting effects in Quake II were good... Unreal features some of the most "real" environments in gaming today

you just never know. You round the corner and spot the door you came in from. Sure enough, the way is brightly lit and free of alien nasties. You head towards the door but as you do, machinery comes to life - there's a hiss, a rumble and the corridor is sealed by a horizontal grate. You turn around - shit! Both ends are sealed. What now?

Everything is dead quiet, and before you have time to consider your predicament, the lights start switching off - one by one, starting from the entrance to the corridor. Click, click, click, click... until you are left in utter, silent darkness. As you scroll through your inventory to look for a flashlight, a flare, anything that emits light, you hear a low growl behind you. You spin around to see a pair of red, slanted eyes staring at you. Without warning, red lights begin strobing around you as the beast starts running

towards you, pulsating techno ringing in your ears. You look down at your ineffectual pistol and think to yourself that Quake was oh so much easier than this...

Be afraid

This is just one situation where I had to hit the pause key to duck out for a quick underdak check. There are many more like it, all well thought out, different, and guaranteed to scare the bejesus out of you. Ok, so it's not like watching Evil Dead 2 when



The adversaries are marvelously animated, although due to a high polygon count you won't see many at once

you're ten, but it's enough to give you a jump start when you're playing alone with the lights out and the subwoofer cranked. For those who like a bit of a challenge, you shouldn't be disappointed with Unreal's many puzzles, tricks and traps. There are heaps of them, but it's not to the infuriating extent of the Hexen games where you just have to give up in frustration and come back to the PC after a good afternoon nap. The game is also linear, meaning no hubs for those that don't like to go back over ground already covered.

So what do you think Epic were doing for these past three odd years? My guess is that they were probably playing a ton of Quake, Quake II, Hexen II, Jedi Knight and any other 3D game they could get their hands on and then said, 'right, let us go forth and beshite upon all of them'. This they hath done, and lo and behold Unreal is before us. All the features you have found in other games are here, as well as some you didn't expect. There are subtle effects: most weapons and ammunition lie on the ground, instead of rotating in the air; there is non-hostile wildlife in all the outdoor areas.

Best Editor ever

Then there is the techie stuff that isn't always necessary with millions of people out there will-



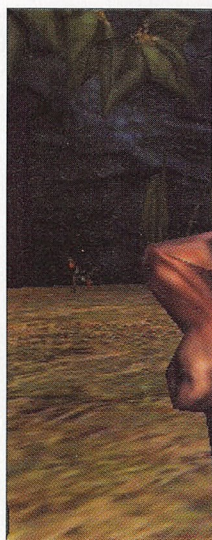
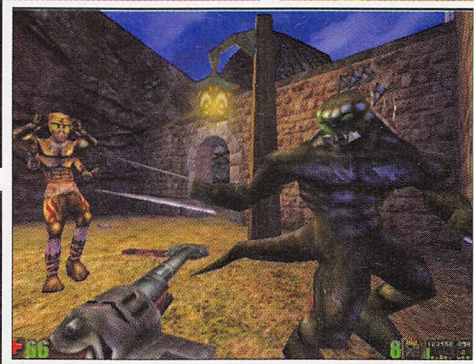
64 PC PowerPlay



Realism means diddly-squat in a 3D game if you are limited to tight corridors and large-ish

rooms with only a hint of the outside world through a window that shows you a sky texture. Unreal takes your previous gaming experiences and carelessly tosses them aside, turns to you with a genuinely quizzical look and says 'oh, there are limits to how big a level can be?' Quake II's outdoor areas look positively tiny compared to some environments in Unreal. Hell, it even gives Jedi Knight a run for its money!

The outdoor areas are simply stunning, with canyons, rivers and a sky so real you'll be staring at it for ages. Shoot up at the



ing and able to hack your game apart for free. First, Epic gives us a crateload of options that are normally found in third-party add-ons like dedicated servers, many different multiplayer games and options. Then they go totally insane and create a scripting language that makes it easier to make mods. If that isn't bad enough, those wacky Americans then go and bundle one of the best level editors yet with the game, letting any schmuck create great looking levels without earning a Masters in Worldcrafting. For those model hackers amongst us, all the creatures and monsters can be imported and exported from high-level graphics tools like 3D Studio Max, allowing modellers who already use these packages to create models for

the game without learning another application. What's up, Epic? Are you trying to give people a life again or what?

Enemies

Ok, so it's the same deal as Quake2 - high poly count means fewer monsters in a room at one time. But these guys are a real challenge! Each monster you face will take you a while to kill, and you have to use deathmatch tactics to teach the big bad boys a lesson.

Monsters are always placed for effect, so that they will be a greater challenge rather than an impediment, or sneak up behind you when you least expect it. The Skaarj are not afraid to jump off ledges or swim through water to get to you and will not get stuck behind walls and doorways. They also know when to retreat and come back to fight another day - damage one too much and he'll start running, which means he becomes the hunted and you are the hunter.

All this intelligence is essentially the work of one man - Stephen Polge, whose name many in the Quake community will instantly recognise as the creator of the hugely popular Reaper Bot. A bot is basically a computer-controlled player that acts a lot more like a flesh-and-blood opponent, and Stephen's bot was used by most serious Quake deathmatchers as practice while there was no one on their favourite servers. You can add bots into any multiplayer game and test your abilities against the computer who won't remember your name and shame you in front of your friends. The Epic lads have also given the bots names that will be all too familiar to videophiles - yes, now you can duke it out with The Kurgan, Ash and Dante, instead of the slightly less imaginative Bot1, Bot2 and Bot3.



Intelligent AI makes for a very different challenge

Weapons

If you're used to the standard pistol, shotgun, machine gun, grenade, rocket, energy weapon progression in other first-person games, then you'll have to rethink your strategy for Unreal. Most weapons have a definite 'class', like automatic fire, spread effects, explosive capability etc, but they all have an alterante-fire mode that turns them into something quite different.

For example, the 8-ball fires grenades in one mode, rockets in the other. Also, the longer you hold the button down, the more projectiles it loads allowing you to fire up to 6 at once. Add to that a compact fire mode where it delivers six rounds in close formation, as well as a lock-on mode and you have six fire modes for one weapon! Add to this the powerups you can find and, well, let's just say you'll need more than a couple of buttons on your pointer of choice. Most of the other weapons have similar intricacies, with some that are only discovered by experimentation.

The weapons are fairly balanced but Quake II wins in this regard. The Assault rifle in Unreal is a little too powerful for its reload time; meaning snipers are going to have a ball with this gun. The GES Biorifle is also quite useless except in extremely close quarters, but since it also has the potential to damage the user, you're better off finding another weapon. Still, with this amount of complexity and diversity, Unreal deathmatch games are going to be something else to behold.

pterodactyl-like creatures flying beneath the planet's twin suns and watch your shots fly on for ages. How many times can you go 'wow' in one game?

Unreal is real

The game physics also mirror real life better than any other game to date. Gravity works like it should - the longer you fall, the faster you go and the more impact you have with the ground, making

for some cool splatter effects. Explosions that rock da house also rock you around, making you lose your footing and mess with your view. Get hit by an 8-ball, and your view doesn't just go red, but you may be knocked and spun around, making you completely disorientated. Projectile weapons have a correct trajectory, and even the shells that fly out of the Automag obey the laws of physics. The attention to detail and realism

is absolutely unparalleled.

A bug or two...

No game is perfect unfortunately, and no matter how many years in development or how much testing goes into a game, the final



The outdoor areas are massive, and put Quake 2's to shame. And the sky... take a break from the shooting and just stare up at the clouds, you'll know what we mean

product will ship with bugs - especially a game as complex as Unreal. Some bugs will affect only a few users, such as the problems experienced with some Cyrix CPUs as well as the video problems for those with Voodoo Rush chipsets on their 3D cards. Some bugs will affect many more, like the lacklustre Internet performance that will cost Epic a huge slice of their fan base if this is not addressed soon. A personal gripe - I hate games with only a handful of save slots. I like to save at least once on every level, and I don't like overwriting slots in case I'm at a point where some-

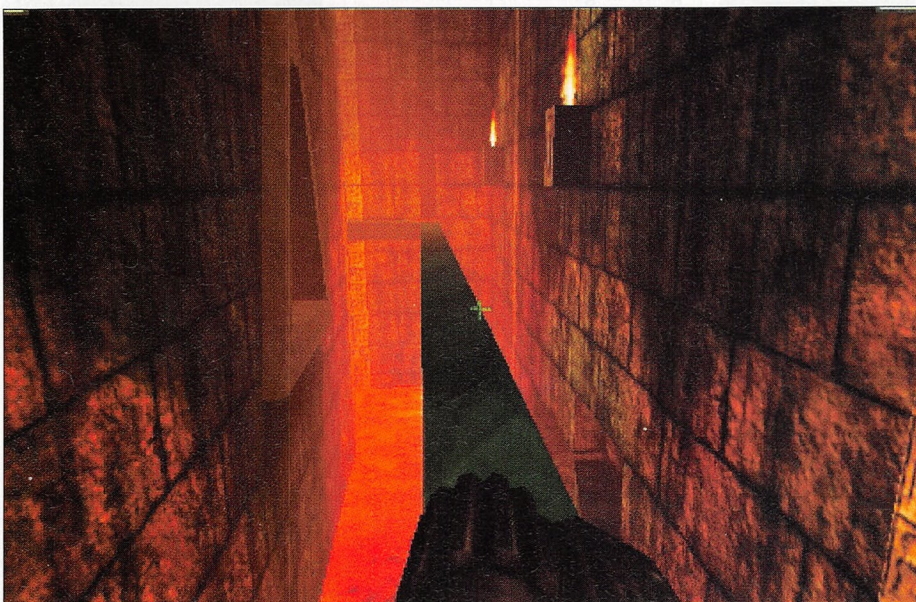
Technology

The fire looks like it's burning, the water ripples as you swim through it - how's it all done? Unreal's game engine has been designed from scratch by the team, which means you'll see a lot of things that make you go 'mmmmm' that you won't find in other games. Unreal sports multi-coloured light and shadow mapping for surfaces with numerous special effects. As well as raytraced and enveloped lighting, there's radial, cylindrical, spotlight, searchlight and spherical lighting, as well as over 20 special effect lights like lens flares and coronas. Epic have been so anal with the lighting that even the water has refractive properties (meaning the light bends in water), just like in real life! 3D volumetric fog mapping means the fog looks more realistic and makes things appear hazy rather than just blocking your vision. The graphics engine also has curved-surface rendering support which virtually eliminates polygonisation (is that a word?) and makes organic objects look rounder. There are reflective surfaces, also making for real mirrors and polished surfaces that do not necessarily have to be flat.

On the sound front there is true 3D positioning via distance attenuation, stereo panning and doppler shifting making the sound 'move' like it does in real life. The music changes are smooth and instantaneous, with fades between songs, tracks and silence performed with no halting.



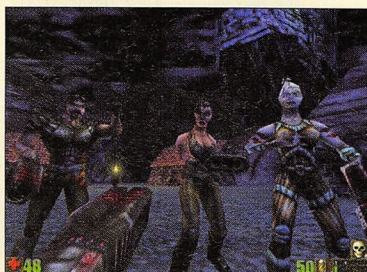
The level of technology in the game is really amazing. You'll want to enable cheat mode just so you can wander around and look at all the cool stuff



Multiplayer

Even though I fear the reprisal of almost every Quaker I know, I'll say here and now that Quake/Quake II Deathmatch does not compare to Unreal. For starters, Unreal includes built-in games like King of the Hill and a new Darkmatch concept (the level is pitch black and everyone carries a flashlight) in addition to the ordinary Deathmatch and Team Deathmatch. Of course, weapon viewing is now de rigeur in multiplayer games, which makes me wonder why games were ever made without it. Unreal's weapons are visible and (mostly) distinguishable which means you can run from the guy with the 8-ball if all you've got is a pistol.

It wouldn't be a multiplayer game without multiple characters to choose from. You get to be male, female or Skaarj in the multiplayer game, which is a little like Quake II's male, female and cyborg, except that Unreal's characters actually have attributes. The chicks are faster and jump higher but are weaker; the lads are middle of the road; and the Skaarj are slower but beefier. Size also does matter as, unlike Quake II, the larger characters have more body area, making them easier to shoot. If you fancy yourself as a bit of a sharpshooter, you can aim for the head and take out your opponents in one shot! Someone giving you a hiding? No worries - just feign death and jump up to frag them when they turn around!



Unreal's developers in multiplayer mode from left; Shane, Jeremy & Myscha

thing really cool is happening. If this irks you too, a little pointer is to save your ten slots, quit the game and jump into your 'saves' directory, move those files to another folder and then start saving all over again. It's a pain in the ass, but it works.

Cutting-edge system requirements

Remember the claim many moons ago that Unreal would run on a 486, back in the olde days without 3D cards? You may laugh, but you won't be chuckling too much unless you are one of the Hardware Elite. Unreal's biggest drawback by far is the system requirements which are probably out of the reach of most gamers. You know how we've been telling y'all to get a 3D card for ages now? Well if you haven't heeded the good word then



The attention to detail is truly astounding. Months from now you'll still be noticing things

Sound

I had an interesting conversation with a blind geek friend of mine a while ago (in case you had a politically correct shudder, he prefers being called 'blind' to 'visually impaired'). He said he'd probably be willing to give Quake (or any other 3D game for that matter) a go if only the sound reflected what you were actually doing. For example, if outdoor valleys echoed more than indoor corridors, if sound was fuzzy underwater, if stepping on different surfaces produced a different sound etc. Welcome to the reality that is Unreal. Apart from the effects I've mentioned above, the sound is completely spatial which means the sound is calculated based on the dimensions of the area you are in, the surface properties of objects around you and other such factors. You really have to hear it to believe it. Crank up the sound all the way to get the full effect, because some sounds like wood burning in a fireplace are too subtle to hear amidst all the gunfire. It all blends together perfectly to totally immerse you.



prepare to be disappointed. Unreal doesn't look all that special using a software renderer, even though most lighting effects still work without a 3D card. Even a P200MMX with a 3Dfx card was struggling a little at 640x480 in deathmatch with a lot of action, but it seemed OK in single player.

However, playing it on a mate's PII 300 with 2 Voodoo 2's (bastard), it was truly breathtaking - 1024x768 with a silky smooth framerate no matter what was on the screen and no delays in texture loading. This game was clearly written with the next generation of cards and processors in mind, so a PII and at least one Voodoo 2 is what you will need to get FPS scores like you are used to with Quake II.

Maybe this is the way to go. Maybe it's OK for a game to take three years to develop if it turns out to be this good. Unreal has given us gamers hope that Sin, Prey, Daikatana et al are not vapourware, and the fact that they will be delivered 'when they're done' means they will be of this calibre. At the very least,

Unreal will show other developers what is possible with today's software, hardware and of course, some excellent ideas.

George Argy



Category 1st person shooter
Players 1-32
Publisher GT / Roadshow
Price \$89.95
Rating MA15+
Available Now

For The most stunning graphics, sound, music and game-play in a 3D game to date. Simply the best all-round game in town.

Against A few bugs that are niggly for some people, but could make the game unplayable for a lot more. Need a serious PC to experience it the way it was meant to be played. Weapons in deathmatch are a little unbalanced.

Need P166, 32MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM, 100MB HDD

Want PII 300, 64MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM, 2 3Dfx's in SLI mode, 3D sound card, 450MB HDD

3D SUPPORT

Direct 3D

PLUS+

The official site is www.unreal.com but check out www.planetunreal.com... for all the latest mods, skins, levels etc, etc.

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MIGHT & MAGIC VI

Much depended on the success of Might and Magic 6 - the reputation of both the RPGs in general and that of 3DO. Both are safe.

After several years abroad pillaging, plundering and generally expanding the empire, Might & Magic has at last arrived back home. Heroes Of Might & Magic may well have performed an admirable job in his cousin's absence, but now the time has come to step aside and relinquish the throne. Throughout the kingdom plenty has changed in the intervening five or so years, so let's hope our returning king has managed to keep abreast of the times.

Recruit NPCs

In the interests of not spoiling any surprises, I won't reveal too much of the plot - save for mentioning it concerns a conspiracy against Enroth's now missing ruler, King Roland. Thickening such murky matters, at the start of the game you are in possession of a letter that implicates the Temple of Baa in this conspiracy.

By then, of course, you will have created your party of adventurers. Initially, the party can consist of four characters, but later you will be able to recruit two additional NPCs whose expertise you may benefit from - for a price, obviously.

There are six classes from which to select (Paladin, Knight, Archer, Druid, Cleric or Sorcerer), each having two innate abilities as well as two more to be determined by you



(every Archer, for example, knows how to wield a Bow with expertise and dabbles in the art of Air Magic, but could also become skilled with the Sword, in Diplomacy, Meditation, or Fire Magic, etc). Further skills can be learned

from the guilds found in towns and cities across the land or by persuading a wandering trainer to join your party. Once you have accumulated some experience points from your adventures, you can visit the training grounds to improve those skills you already possess.

Real-time 3D

The world of Enroth is superbly detailed. Full of rolling hills, green pastures, flowing rivers and towering



mountains, the landscape looks tremendous. Buildings, from small shops to stable houses and large castles, are vividly illustrated and packed with olde worlde charm. I ought to point out that the 3D engine is real-time, and so the movement isn't restricted

to the step-by-step form favoured by many RPGs. In M&MVI you do get full freedom of movement. Conversing with the people you meet in your travels gives you less freedom. When chatting with someone, you are given three dialogue options (ie. keywords) to choose from - it's just a case of clicking then reading the response. Those expecting Ultima-like levels of conversational depth will be disappointed, but they aren't Daggerfall-style generic information desks either, if you know what I mean.

Limited combat

Even though the game is real-time, it can however be manually switched to turn-based



"Fetch the mead, barkeep, the wenches & I have adventures to forge"

at any point. As you might imagine, this is especially useful during combat which otherwise can degenerate into a rather confusing clickfest. Basically, as soon as you spy a monster you should hit 'Enter' and play out the battle by taking turns. There's no swapping to a separate combat screen or anything, you remain at all times within the confines of the 1st-person 3D view. After fumbling through my first few fights, I gradually realised that this works quite well and, in fact, is not too dissimilar to previous M&M games. The only drawback - and this is my only reservation about the entire





No 3D acceleration, but the 3D RPG is here & it makes a world of difference



game - is that it still makes for a tactically limited combat system. You cannot move while in turn-based mode (to flee or advance, you have to switch back to real-time and move using the arrow keys), nor can you adjust your formation (positioning your Knight in the front line to protect your Druid, for instance, is not an option). Nevertheless, the

PLUS+

combat does feel strategic and, importantly, not like an action game at all.

Best RPG in years

I think it's fair to say that Might & Magic VI presents us with the finest party-based RPG in years (and without doubt the best since the heady days of Lands Of Lore, Ultima VII, and indeed M&MV, back in the early 90s). Typical for any great RPG, it's often hard to pinpoint precisely why this is the case, but I tend to believe it has a lot to do with balance. By that I mean getting the balance right between story and combat, giving us plenty to do without getting bogged down in tiresome dungeon hacks. Within that story there

also needs to be a balance between linearity (the main quest) and non-linearity (various sub-plots) and between different types of interaction (conversing with NPCs and the use of character skills). And again, within the combat there should be a balance struck between using might and - yes - magic (meaning that one ought not to be more successful than the other).

Explaining, particularly in a 1000 word review, exactly how and why M&MVI achieves all this is nigh on impossible. I guess it's more of a feeling. In some RPGs you have that sense of being lead through the whole game, while others seem like a test of endurance as you wander around in search of something to do. However, and just trust me on this, M&MVI feels right. It's balanced, you see.

Thankfully, Might & Magic has returned to a heroes welcome and is more than ready to once again take its rightful seat on the throne.

David Wildgoose



91%

Category RPG
Players 1
Publisher 3DO/New World
Price \$TBA
Rating TBA
Available Now

For A bloody great RPG with oodles of depth. A cracking story set within a brilliantly immersive world. Perfectly balanced gameplay.

Against Combat perhaps lacks some important tactical options. Use of generic sprites for most NPCs detracts from the realism.

Need P90, 16Mb RAM

Want P166, 32Mb RAM, 4Mb video card



CORE CONTINGENCY

Total Annihilation add-on pack

The King of Real Time Strategy games returns with the best value mission pack we've ever seen.

Total Annihilation fans prepare to feel sick after playing this expansion. Not sick from disappointment - we're talking about the sort of nausea you get from litres of adrenaline pumping through your body with no physical outlet except hours upon hours of mouse clicking. The 75 new units offer such a sweet dilemma of tactical choices, you'll forever banish any thoughts of lame expansion packs. Marvel as cloaking nuclear mines detonate, transforming vast areas into metal graveyards. Laugh like a crazed megalomaniac as your fleet of hovercraft speed past enemy battleships securing a beachhead. Oh how sweet it is.

Plot be damned!

Arm forces have secured victory in their 4000 year old war with the evil Core. Well, so they thought, for Core have saved their best plan to last. A secret alien artifact exists, which if found can level the entire galaxy in one quick strike. So goes the plotline behind the single player missions. TA's excellent reputation has never really been based on its solo player aspect. Multiplayer is where the action is, and Core Contingency doesn't really change this.

Unlike Starcraft there's no major characters, plot twists etc. It's all about

destroying the enemy base through a series of (tough) missions. Enjoyable, but not awe-inspiring. If you don't have access to human opponents the computer AI in Skirmish mode has been improved, but not in quantum leaps. It still does silly things like roaming construction units about the place, without any great purpose or more importantly armed escorts. Starcraft is better in this department.

Whet your appetite

Power up your Net connection, modem or LAN and prepare for RTS bril-



the Guns of Navarone look like little Johnny's half filled water pistol. Just the sight of watching these multi-barrelled instruments of pain pump long range shells out at high speed, comes disturbingly close to a sexual experience.

Behold: The Krogoth

A slight disappointment though is the Core Krogoth.

The bigger than anything Kbot was hyped as being the most powerful unit ever to appear in TA. There's no doubt its multiple air to ground weapon systems are massively haul ass, but considering the guy takes 30 minutes to build, it's a shame one enemy Commander D-Gun blast takes him out. I'm sure I cried when I lost my Krogoth in this way.

If you are a multiplayer TA'er (and if you're not, become one ASAP) then Core Contingency is an absolute must have. TA has now been pushed to an even higher level of warfare on a grand scale. For single players, it's fun but just doesn't have the same kick as mate vs mate conflict. Now all we need is an Internet playing matching service ala Battle.net, c'mon Cavedog!

Pete Sharpe

The single player missions are more of the same, it's multiplayer where the new units really shine

90%

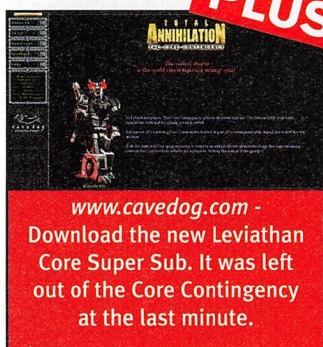
Category Real time strategy
Players 1-8
Publisher Cavedog
Price \$29.95
Rating G8+
Available Now

For Six new worlds are tasty as well. Fight battles in urban environments, using car wrecks for metal. Battle sea serpents in waterworld, pity there's no Kevin Costner to shoot.

Against AI in skirmish mode is still TA's Achilles Heel.

Need Original Copy of TA

Want P166, 32 Mb RAM.

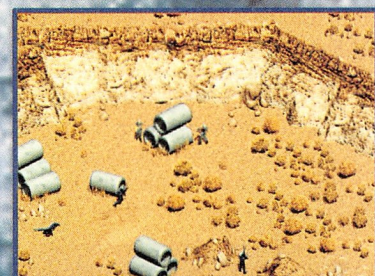


www.cavedog.com - Download the new Leviathan Core Super Sub. It was left out of the Core Contingency at the last minute.



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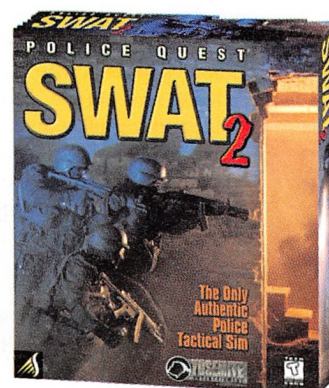
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OUTWARS

She's a wee ripper! Heart-stopping action and truly insightful mission design make Outwars the action game of the moment.

Apologies first to any of his relatives or loved ones who may perchance be reading this, but it had to be done. For the good of mankind. In the line of duty. Etc. I had to kill Kalinsky. I'm truly sorry.

Nah, forget that. I've got nothing to apologise for, it was his own damn fault. Upon receiving a distress call from a nearby ship, Kalinsky and I raced to its assistance. The ship was under attack and needed us to give it time to complete some repairs to its engine. Aliens were approaching from both sides of the ship, forcing us to shoot past it if we were

an ice-covered planet, apparently a distant outpost of human inhabitation, when it is suddenly under bombardment by a fierce-some alien force. The goal of your first mission is simply to run like hell across the alien-infested snow and make it back to your dropship alive. In the background you can see huge explosions, fires raging and illuminating the billowing smoke from the ruined bases, and spaceships followed by missiles zipping through the night sky. Game beginnings simply do not get much better or more adrenalin-charging.

Thankfully it follows this with frequent comparably stunning moments of gameplay brilliance. In the fourth mission, what commences as a routine combat training program is soon interrupted as, first, your instructor goes missing and, second, a pair of star-shaped alien ships appear overhead to



to hit the ones on the other side. Unfortunately, Kalinsky was being particularly careless and several times he managed to accidentally hit our ship.

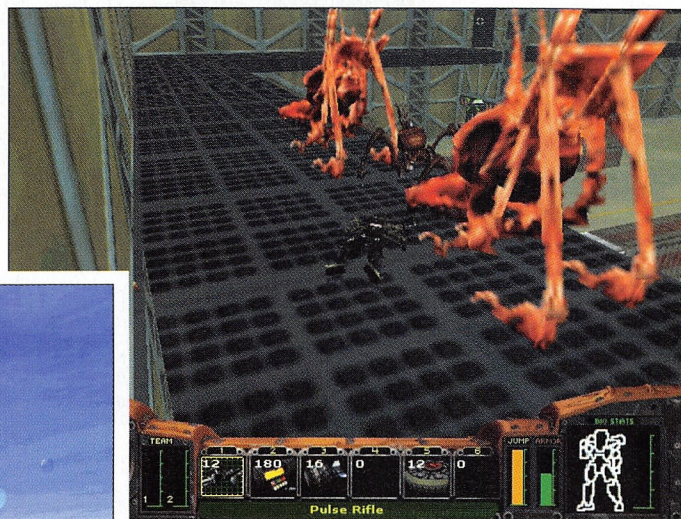
Rightly fearing that any further damage would spell failure in our mission, I fired a few shots at my colleague in the hope of dissuading him from pursuing any more "friendly fire". He then retaliated with a few shots of his own. So I lobbed several frag grenades straight at him to teach him a lesson. That reckless "loose cannon" now dealt with, I proceeded to stave off the alien hordes and complete the mission myself. In debriefing I pleaded "collateral damage" and barely avoided a court-martial by the skin of my teeth.

Starts with a bang

Outwars begins with a stroke of genius. You find yourself on



deposit several squadrons of ground troops intent on making sure you never graduate. In fact, the entire structure of the missions throughout the game is first class. Variety, originality and a healthy supply of unex-



One of the most outstanding aspects of Outwars is the mission structure

pected twists are the keys to creating cool, rewarding missions. Outwars has them all.

Memorable gaming

I just won't forget things like charging down terrific, "no-man's land" tunnels chock full of hideous scorpion-like aliens exchanging volleys of rocket pods and laser death. Falling victim to those grotesquely pink, grasshopper-like beasts that shriek with skin-crawling delight before jumping straight for your face is an experience that will remain with me for quite some time. Nor will I quickly forget hiding behind flimsy crates, while all around aliens dispense

these swarming blue energy pulses that unerringly homed in on my precarious position. I was huddled with my back pressed to the crate, listening for that painful humming noise and praying that the crate wouldn't explode just yet. That's how good Outwars can get at its very best.

Detracting from my enjoyment at times is that the controls are just a little awkward. On one memorably accursed occasion, I



Microsoft's gaming division is really beginning to prove itself. Or at least the 'games company acquisition' division, anyway



was standing atop a giant elevator shaft, at the base of which were several vicious aliens. As soon as I leaped into the shaft these aliens would shoot me. So I had to nip out with my jet-pack, drop a proximity mine then return to the doorway where I had entered. Sounded simple enough - or so I

thought - until it took me three attempts (beginning from the start of the level each time because you cannot save mid-level - tsf) to eventually triumph, primarily due to the fact that I couldn't co-ordinate my hands around the appropriate controls with any degree of certainty. Or maybe I'm just crap.

Control concerns

It occurs to me that the entire game may well have benefitted from a slower and more thoughtful pace. Granted, you are mostly able to play at your own pace, but there are numerous occasions when you are forced into treating the game like an especially frantic deathmatch. And I'm not just talking about the timed missions either. Certainly there's

nothing wrong with fast-paced action, let me assure you, but when it's hindered by a less-than-perfect control then we have a problem.

I can't help but think that as an action game, Outwars really needs a cleaner control system. Here's two ideas for the inevitable sequel - one, reduce the reliance on the jet-pack and maintain the pace as it is, or two, keep the jet-pack and slow things down a touch. Personally, I would opt for the latter.

Outwars is a fine game, I loved it. While it may not as yet be on first name terms with greatness, it will at least be introduced to it at parties. Or something.

David Wildgoose



85%

Category Action
Players 1-Multi
Publisher Microsoft
Price TBA
Rating G8+
Available Now

For An excellent distillation of many of the best bits of Jedi Knight and Terra Nova. Lengthy and challenging single player game. Co-operative play is fantastic, too.

Against Slightly cumbersome controls and occasionally ragged graphics.

Need P133, 16Mb RAM, 4xCD, Win95

Want 3D card

3D SUPPORT

Direct 3D



Check out either
www.microsoft.com/games/outwars or www.zone.com

REDNECK RAMPAGE RIDES AGAIN

It's getting harder and harder to find a 3D game that'll run on your old, unaccelerated PC. This may be the last...

Expansion packs are funny old things. Some publishers think an expansion pack is simply a bundle of levels thrown together in some semblance of order. Others put together new levels, enemies, weapons and may even tweak the game a little. Both approaches are fine, as long as the consumer knows what they are getting. Neither approach means anything when you apply it to a game as bad as Redneck Rampage.

Soul-less and dated

Maybe I missed some deep, hidden subtext in the original game, but I did not see it as a witty, even humorous pisstake on Southern Americana. I saw it as another game that was attempting to ride on the 3D shooter bandwagon to make a buck and wasting the consumer's precious grey matter in deciding whether or not they should buy the game.



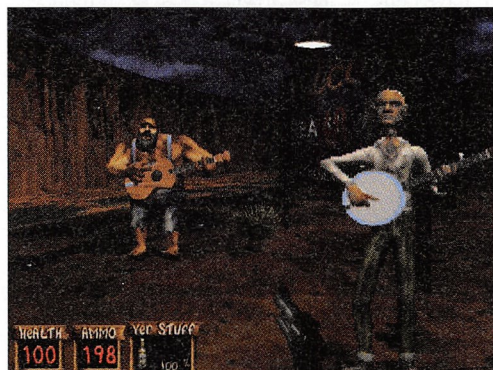
Redneck Rampage would have been a great game in its time if it had no competition whatsoever in the 3D shooter category. Unfortunately, it had plenty, and couldn't really differentiate itself from the rest. It was humorous, but not truly funny like Duke 3D. It had its own identity, but no real atmosphere like Blood. It was basically a clone, and this pack is nothing more than an expansion of this sameness.

Now that the nasty business is out of the way, I'll tell you a bit

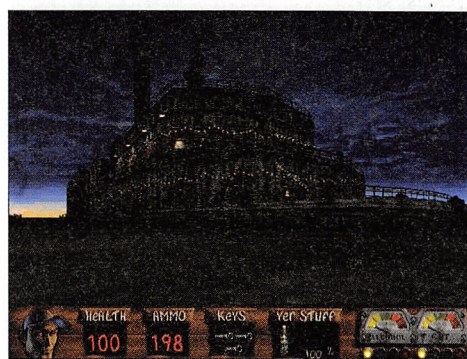
about the current offering. Redneck Rampage Rides Again sort of picks up where Suckin' Grits on Route 66 left off, which in turn picked up where the original Redneck Rampage left off. Once again, Leonard and Bubba are fighting alien nasties and, erm, that's about as much plot as you're gonna git.

Great for slow, old PCs

This new Rampage utilises the Build engine, which will look instantly familiar to fans of Duke 3D and Blood. The Build engine provided an excellent alternative to the Doom-style engines at the time, as it added many enhanced features like look up/down, transparency/translucency, reflective



Sadly, the pleasure of sending dynamite-stuffed chickens at alien cloned cheerleaders is short lived. The Build engine is dead, man



surfaces, map overlays (to produce '3D' levels) and many other graphical and gameplay enhancements. These are all good things. Compared to today's technology however, the Build engine looks positively flat and dated. Even the installation process and the game itself runs under DOS, and obviously there is no support for new generation of 3D sound cards.

It doesn't totally suck as there are a couple of aspects that make it interesting, if not fun, for a few minutes. One of the new weapons, a crossbow that fires chickens with sticks of dynamite up their proverbial was pretty funny, but not something I'd pay good money to see (check out the screenshots, they're free). There are also vehi-



cles that you can jump on, like a Hog and a swamp buggy that add a different element to the game play as you have jousts with bikies



who are similarly equipped. True, it's not the first 3D shooter to add vehicles (ah sweet, sweet Terminator Skynet) but it sure adds to multiplayer fun.

Multiplayer runs surprisingly smoothly if you can navigate through the archaic setup menu. I didn't get a chance to give multiplayer a decent go, as the first two games crashed in multiplayer after playing for a while, and besides that, the weapons are totally unbalanced for multiplay.



5 years ago, this would have been quite impressive. It's not 5 years ago

Music by Mojo

The sounds are the same as the previous two games with some new one-liners thrown in. The music in the game was written by Mojo Nixon, which makes me wonder if he saw the final product. The level design is also disappointing, as they don't have interesting puzzles, and they follow the tired-old routine of find the key, unlock a door, maybe flick a switch here or there and kill the big bad guy at the end.

Redneck Rampage Rides Again adds little to the original game other than the ultra-lame Suckin' Grits on Route 66 did: 14 levels, a couple of new weapons, enemies and vehicles. Let's hope Xatrix's expansion pack for Quake II is better than this rehashed dribble.

George Argy

48%

Category 3D Shooter
Players 1-6
Publisher Interplay
Price \$69.95
Rating M15+
Available Now

For Great if you've got an older machine. Doesn't require the original game.

Against More of the same that wasn't good to begin with. Why would anyone waste development time on this?

Need P90, 16MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM, 150MB HDD

Want A money back guarantee

3D SUPPORT

No hardware support

ANCIENT EVIL

With balanced and considered gameplay, this Australian RPG homes in on the essence of catacomb-crawling.

It will be fascinating to monitor the role-playing games released this year to see exactly what sort of effect, if any, the success of Diablo has had. Despite being nothing more than an action game with minor RPG elements, Blizzard's swords 'n' sorcery epic still revitalised interest in games involving orcs, wizards and battle-axes. Yet has Diablo revived the RPG genre as a whole, or has it just forged a more mainstream sub-genre? If Ancient Evil is in any way representative, it might just have done the latter.

Alaric has entered the Crypt

Alaric, the famed and feared mage, set up home many years ago in the Crypt of the Ancients. Ever since he has sought challengers to come forth and test themselves, risking their lives to capture the handsome reward for surviving the Crypt and revealing its lost secret. Seeking new dangers, you decide to take up



Despite Diablo's predominance as a multiplayer game, SLS decided only to allow for single play. Why?

if he practices hard enough.

The interface is nicely designed and quite flexible. Everything can be done via the mouse or keyboard, or any combination of the two. Hot keys can also be configured for your favourite spells. I thought the jump command was a mite fiddly, but it's not something that will be exercised all that often anyway.

RPG-lite

Compared to *Might & Magic VI*, also reviewed this issue, Ancient Evil is

fairly simplistic - an RPG-lite, as it were. Consisting to a large extent of hack and slash action with either weapons or magic, it is perhaps just too simplistic. But, you might argue, Diablo was not exactly overly-complex and still managed to be a

great game. Of course, I would reply, that's true - simplicity is not necessarily always a negative. However, Diablo had the significant advantage of a supremely playable multi-player game which Ancient Evil, restricted as it is to solo adventuring only, cannot compete against.

Perhaps an even more telling difference is that in Diablo there always appeared to be something happening, some creatures to kill or new room to investigate. By contrast, Ancient Evil can feel uncomfortably bare at

times - it gets depressing (and a little boring) wandering through too many empty and inconsequential corridors.

Engaging storyline

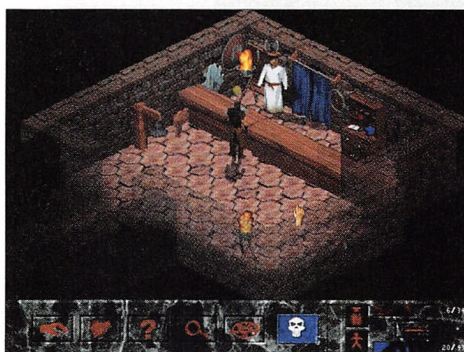
Against that, Silver Lightning have had a decent stab at creating an engaging storyline with the unfurling tale of Alaric, meaning the subdued atmos-



Alaric's challenge and enter the Crypt yourself. You can play as any of four character classes - warrior, spellcaster, ranger or thief - but, in a disastrous blow to gender equality in computer gaming, you can only be a bloke (apologies to our small, but loyal female readership). Character improvement is a neat mix of class-based and skills-based development.

Your initial class choice gives you a predilection for certain abilities, but doesn't lay down limiting restrictions. For example, your thief has a natural talent for picking locks or hiding in shadows and could also become adept at wielding a sword or crossbow





The graphics are much crisper and cleaner than Diablo, but there's a disappointing emptiness to the catacombs

phere of the game does seem somehow appropriate. Through the reading of discovered parchments and books, you learn bit by bit the history of the Crypt and its inhabitants. While it does convey the impression that you are on the verge of uncovering some terrible dark



secret (the eponymous "ancient evil", I suppose), I would

have preferred to see more characters giving life and voice to the story. Jetrael, a previous challenger to Alaric's domain, appears at one point to provide a nice surprise, but it's not really enough. Having said that, Ancient Evil does certainly fare better in the plot department than did Diablo.

Getting the details right is essential for any good game, and Ancient Evil does it better than most. I'm thinking of the little things that make you go, "Hey, that's really cool", that enhance your enjoyment to such an extent that you're in a positive enough mood to overlook the minor faults you may have found earlier. When you manage to slay a Grym, this lumbering, mummy-

like undead monster, you can collect its bandages for use later in tending to your wounds - an inspired idea. One especially neat touch is that rather than providing a

list of the game's items in the manual, you instead need to find a book written by one of Alaric's servants in which he has recorded all the artifacts to be found in the Crypt. Can we have more manuals hidden in games please?

Impressive visual subtleties

Graphically, Ancient Evil won't amaze, but does possess some impressive visual subtleties. The animation of your character is very good (with other creatures less so). Lighting effects, in particular, are truly excellent. Every level is dark and creepy, a situation only heightened by the gorgeous flickering of light on the stone walls and floor of the Crypt, as well as all the furniture, creatures and even the smallest objects on the ground. As you walk past the wall-mounted

torches, your shadow (or shadows, if there are two or more light sources) will move at precisely the correct angle. Now, that's really cool.

David Wildgoose

72%

Category Action/RPG

Players 1

Publisher Silver Lightning

Price \$69.95

Rating TBA

Available Now

For Accessible and rather enjoyable Diablo-style action RPG. Neatness abounds.

Against No multi-player options. Can feel a bit dull and empty at times.

Need Pentium, 16Mb RAM, 4xCD, Win95

Want P133



CASTROL HONDA SUPERBIKE WORLD CHAMPIONS

Moto Racer got us wanting a proper, full-on, hardcore bike sim. Now we've got one. It's just a bit hard, though...

Alright! What has two wheels, is more expensive than your current mortgage, goes round and round in circles for hours on end, and ends up soaked in bubbly after a particularly good day out and about? It's Grandpa in his Wheelie-Chair 2000 SX (this thing has its own phone number dammit!) after he's found the stash of super special happy pills!

100%, 100% of the time

Oh dear. Okay, I'll admit that wasn't very funny. It's just that I've just finished a marathon session of this motorcycle racing



game and I really need to break the ice somehow, change the mood a bit. In this case, I didn't finish the race willingly. It was Vetinari "retiring" me from the race on lap 10 on the North Allerton course (on a straight of all places), serving as a friendly reminder that you don't keep a hungry cat waiting. You see, attempting a 100km race where a spontaneous nervous twitch or a bit of unwanted wind can spell the end of the race has this mystifying quality of really affecting your mind. A state of mind that can only be reached after racing the same course over and over, each time managing a few more laps under the belt. Each time retiring early thanks to uncontrollable circumstances.

Totally pretend-real

Castrol Honda Super Bikes World Champions is a damn good racing sim title. This is mostly thanks to the sense of



An impressively detailed learning curve is available, though even on the easiest settings it's quite difficult

authenticity that permeates almost every aspect of this game. You've got here a full-on motorcycle championship game, with very few areas lacking. Developers Interactive Entertainment apparently had access to Honda North America's and the World Championship Castrol Honda Team's data banks to ensure an impressive level of realism (it's always impressive when they get the logos right...). Everything from gear type and ratios to the type of material used for the seat was divulged. This means that not only do the bikes in this game look like the real thing,

they may even handle like the real thing too.

Tracks also have been modelled on the actual 1997 championship race courses around the world. Perhaps the only notable departure from the realism stakes here however, is that CHSBWC alternates tracks from the official speedway to "street" courses in championship. Rather than a spate of the existing raceways (which, let's face it, become familiar far too quickly), Interactive Entertainment have spliced these with a track in the same location, built much like the major F1 Grand Prix courses - ie. using existing roadways to construct the track. The result is a more challenging race (with hazards like hump back bridges, and kerbs to worry

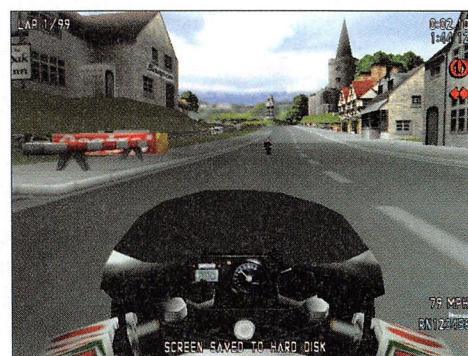
about), with the ability to show off more interesting scenery and the stunning graphics engine.

Visually, CHSBWC is outstanding. The frame rate is high, detail is high. Bikes are superbly rendered - as are the riders themselves. Gone are the days of puppet riders that seem to stick to bikes and sort of manage to stay on them when going round bends. In Castrol Honda Superbike, you'll see the rider's knee extend as they use

their body weight to keep balanced going in to a bend. One particularly impressive effect is the way the view perspective tilts as you go into turns, to simulate the position of the bike. The only thing stopping the developers from whacking a label reading "Warning, motion sickness pills recommended" on the box is that they didn't include a vertical plane tilt to simulate acceleration and braking!

Sluggish superbikes

One area of concern however, was regarding the driving engine. As most of you that played the demo included on last issue's cover disk would have noticed, the bikes felt rather



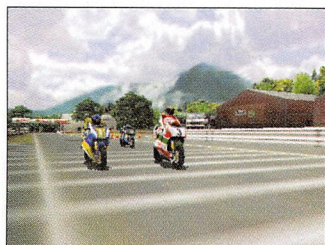


A good variety of camera angles are available, and the detail put into this overall makes it a top quality sim

sluggish to control. This apparently, is the way the bikes are supposed to handle. Controlling a 163 kilogram beast with horse power to rival the F1 cars isn't supposed to be easy. We have it on the Castrol Honda team's good word that the bike does handle very closely to the real thing. Who are we to argue? More importantly, be it a bug or a feature, the game does handle a little sluggishly - though in context, feels about right.

As far as the

rest of the game goes, there's no point delving too deeply into all of its features. Castrol Honda Super Bike World Champions is a game of pure class. Racers are competitive, the graphics are great, there are more than enough options



to satisfy the most demanding of players, and it all feels like a fine, true to life racing sim. There's very little to fault with it.

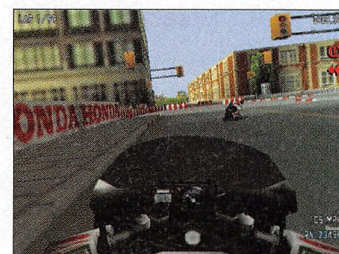
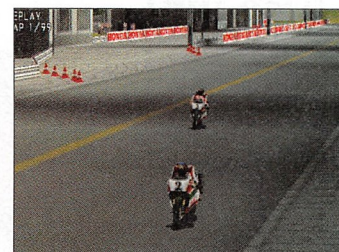
Then there's the driving model. I envisage two main types of people salivating at the thought of playing Super Bike WC. The Moto Racer crowd, and the completely serious grand prix championship crowd. The action craving crowd will have a tough time of easing into CHSBWC, simply because there's no action aspect to the game. Even with the difficulty on easy and all damage set to minimal you've got a racing game here that requires a very anal approach. If you try to race for speed, you get cut down virtually right away. With the automatic break assistance on,

you are slowed down (to a crawl virtually) to take the corner at a comfortable speed. The only top speeds you hit are on straights. Turn off the assistance, and you will eat asphalt when you take the next turn. Not fun at all.

Need practise...

As for the racing enthusiasts, CHSBWC represents a pure challenge. This game will either make or break you. With the game set to mimic the real world, CHSBWC is almost impossibly difficult. The importance of taking a turn at the right speed is the most crucial aspect at this level. Without the aid of automatic breaking and automatic transmission, completing even a cut down version of a race is extremely difficult. It's not because the game is lacking in any area - far from it. It does a great job of simulating motorcycle racing, which is by nature a much more difficult sport than racing on four wheels. The opportunity to topple is constantly there, and any lapse in full concentration will most certainly end the race. It'll take lots of practice before racing will start to feel intuitive.

I had a hard time making it to lap 10 of a race, with the difficulty set to novice. The difficulty of racing with the reality factor turned up a notch is so high that CHSB's Achilles Heel is that it's a near spot-on simulator. Interactive Entertainment have wisely given us the options to gently build up the difficulty in small increments,



though this doesn't detract from the fact that Castrol Honda Superbike World Champions is a completely serious, demanding racing simulator.

March Stepnik

89%

Category Racing Sim
Players 1-6
Publisher Interactive Entertainment
Price \$79.95
Rating G
Available Now

For A stunningly accurate simulation of the racing world. Multiplayable. Grand Prix 2 on two wheels.

Against Oh so difficult. I've not played a game more challenging in my life, and chances are neither have you. Split screen two player mode really slows the system down.

Need Win 95, P133, 16Mb RAM

Want PII, 64 Mb RAM, 3D accelerator

3D SUPPORT

Direct 3D

PLUS+

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MONSTER TRUCK MADNESS 2

Big Microsoft makes Big game about Big trucks with Big wheels. Big time fun!



damage, and most unique to a driving game; if either front fender is dinged, your headlights are modified to the direction the headlight is now facing.

There are now no longer any tournaments, instead there are circuits, and a rally, which is much longer. The tracks themselves are all enhanced with more scenery and hazards. You now have to cross train tracks complete with oncoming trains.

engine idle nor loss in resistance from over steering (as exhibited in Ultimate Race Pro). Still, driving on the train track does give your hand a good shaking.

In terms of playability at beginner level, it's way too easy and all the fun to be had is definitely in professional mode. Here your Monster Truck swerves all over the place - bouncing from a wall to another truck is a delightfully destructive experience.

MTM2 isn't trying to be a serious racing sim, there are too many of those around already. Instead it's a joyously fun game with big wheels, big crashes and a light hearted commentary to keep you smiling.

Jere Lawrence

Whenver a sequel comes out, there's always a certain controversy over whether the game should be something completely different, or instead offer more of what the original did well enough to make it a hit. Tomb Raider 2 is a prime example of this, as is Monster Truck Madness 2 (MTM2). Although to some this is an absolute travesty, I'm from the school of thinking that "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" - and there was nothing broken with MTM1.

Rock and Roll Racing

MTM2 places you back in control of the car crushing metal behemoths known as Monster Trucks. For those not familiar with these freaks of the motoring world, the best description of Monster Trucking came from the original MTM review by David Wildgoose who described it as the speedways' equivalent of "Rock and Roll Wrestling". Almost prophetic, one of the coolest new features of MTM2 is the ability to drive trucks named after current WCW (and NWO) Professional Wrestlers. Even better is the occasional video from a choice wrestler commenting on your racing performance.

Graphically, MTM2 is extremely impressive and far superior to the original. Textures



are significantly improved and there's a higher polygon count for the trucks, as well as numerous new 3D special effects.

Luminous glow

The effects include absolutely gorgeous object reflection in the water (even the background bitmapped moon is reflected). There's a luminous glow around light sources and even coloured light sources themselves. Not all trucks headlights are white, some are red or green, complete with a coning effect. Seeing a truck ahead with red headlights blazing the trail at night is a special 3D moment.

The trucks themselves now crumple on impact, with body

It's a bit of a pity, but there's no tournament mode this time, just single races

Graveyard silliness

Another track in the spirit of silliness takes place in a graveyard, where you go underground and trample over a series of coffins. Other tracks with high potential are more disappointing though. Voodoo Island, for example, looks very much like a set from Jurassic park. All you want to see is a whopping big T-Rex come stomping over and devour the guy in front of you, but sadly, this never happens.

MTM2 also supports Force Feedback joysticks, but doesn't really use the technology to its fullest. For one, there's no

82%

Category Racing
Players 1-8
Publisher Microsoft
Price \$TBA
Rating G8+
Available Now

For Wonderful 3D accelerated graphics. Pure simple fun.

Against Want more destructive environments. Opponents aren't aggressive enough, tending more to smack you round. On a Pentium 200MMX 3D accelerated more than 4 opponents significantly slows the game down.

Need Pentium 166, Win 95, 8Mb RAM

Want Pentium II 233, 32 MB RAM

3D SUPPORT

Direct 3D, Native 3Dfx Glide

SEGA



ARE YOU READY 2 RALLY?

Featuring handbrake. Only at leading arcades.

SEGA RALLY
2
CHAMPIONSHIP™

PILGRIM

Sex, religion and politics. The big no-no's for conversation. And now, it seems, games...



If I can recall correctly, I've only been to Sunday school twice in my life. We were staying with relatives and as things worked out, were invited (I think they insisted) to learn about religion the fun way. All that I can remember is that the teacher was a scary beast of a woman and that she kept demanding that her students regularly bring her a glass of water to soothe her very hoarse throat. This they did automatically. Looking back at it now, the teacher looked as if she would have really enjoying terrifying young children with tales of fire and brimstone, if it was not for the fact that she herself was intimidated by her own stories. Somehow, the frequent outbursts of hysteria seemed quite natural there.

Great expectations

The lasting impression I got from the short experience was that religious types know how to tell a fantastic story. With Paulo Coelho, author of such well known titles as *The Alchemist* and the Pilgrimage writing the screenplay, and popular French artist Moebius, aka Jean Giraud (his work has also been seen in such films as *Alien*, and *The Abyss*) providing the visual design, *Pilgrim* the game looked rather promising, and somewhat exciting.

Fulfilling your father's dying wish, you are to deliver a pre-



cious manuscript to a friend of your dear Papa. Before you know it, you've got the head Inquisitor of Pope Innocent III chasing after you, and enemies at every turn. With the subtitle of "Faith as a weapon", I was inspired to swallow my preconceptions and dive into this religious adventure game with an open mind.

Butchered

Oh crap. Someone should take Faith and bludgeon the developers of *Pilgrim* to within an inch of their "creative" capacity. The near death experience might enlighten them to the subtleties of creating an enjoyable adventure game. The main reason being, the development team took a perfectly suitable storyline and butchered it with just about every no-no in the adventure making book.

Firstly, *Pilgrim* is as linear as they come - you can do nothing till you make the only possible next move. Lesson #1: If the game has to be somewhat linear,

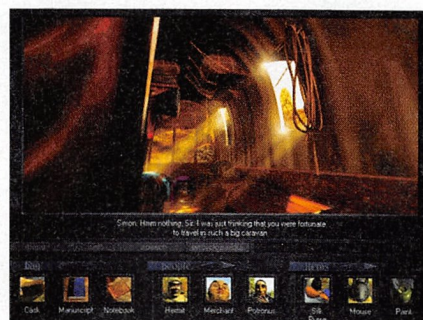
open up the gameplay area a bit! There's nothing worse than having only one thing to do next and having a small area of space to do it in.

The interface is excusable, but then comes movement. You're in location A, and you want to get to location B, which is the equivalent of one screen's distance to the north east. Rather than taking the most direct route, you must turn right, turn right, move forward (south) one screen, turn left, go forward (east) one screen, turn right

again and go south, the turn left again, move one screen east, turn left once more, then move 3 screens north to get to B. Follow me? I'm not sure whether this system is a result of pure ignorance, or a clever way of disguising the small game play area by giving the player more leg work. Again though, I could have coped with this just to take part in the wonderful story.

Cardboard personality

Then there's the characters. Your first few hours in *Pilgrim* will be centred around a situation virtually unnecessary to the plot. What makes this worse is that the characters have the personality of cardboard, demand the most trivial things, and have been voiced terribly. Your character's voice, sounds very close to that of Nigel Tuffnel from



It's like that Christian TV show that Baldrick does on Sundays, albeit in the form of a very bad game

Spinal Tap (they're real!). This is cool for about 2 minutes. Anything beyond that takes you into full throttle mode.

Pilgrim suffers in that way where everything works against the story being told in an enjoyable manner. Perhaps the first game where the association with the Christian religion is its strongest point.

March Stepnik

46%

Category Adventure
Players 1
Publisher Infogames
Price \$TBA
Rating G
Available Now

For It includes an online encyclopedia where you can look up the wondrous exploits of famous religious figure heads!

Against The talents of two respectable artists have been put to waste. Windowed mode only. Even the discs make lousy coasters.

Need Pentium, Win 95

Want 32Mb Ram, P120.

PLUS+

Jean Giraud

http://www.geo.fmi.fi/~tmakinen/cartoons/books/moebius_enx.shtml

Check this web site out to see what Moebius is famous for.

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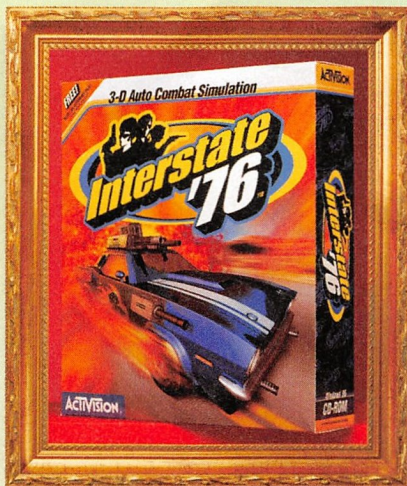
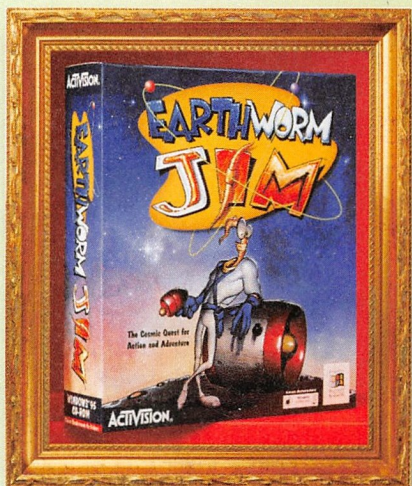
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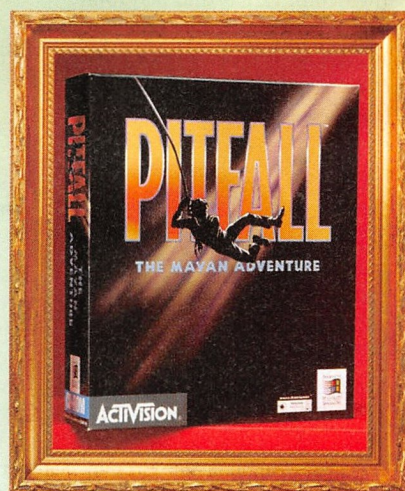
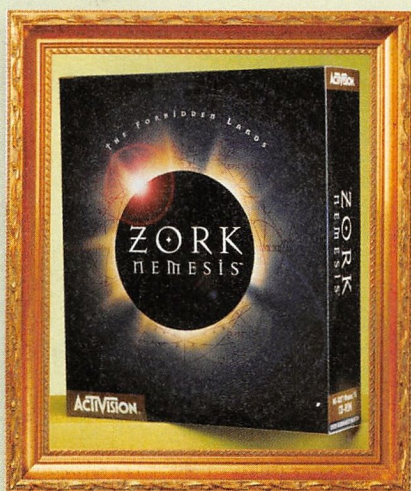
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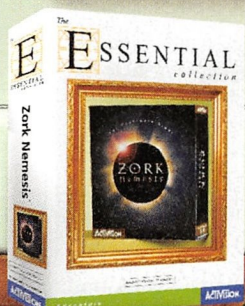
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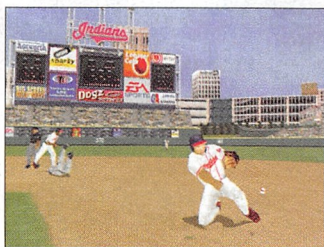
TRIPLE PLAY 99

Whether or not you know the rules, or even care, baseball games translate beautifully to the PC.

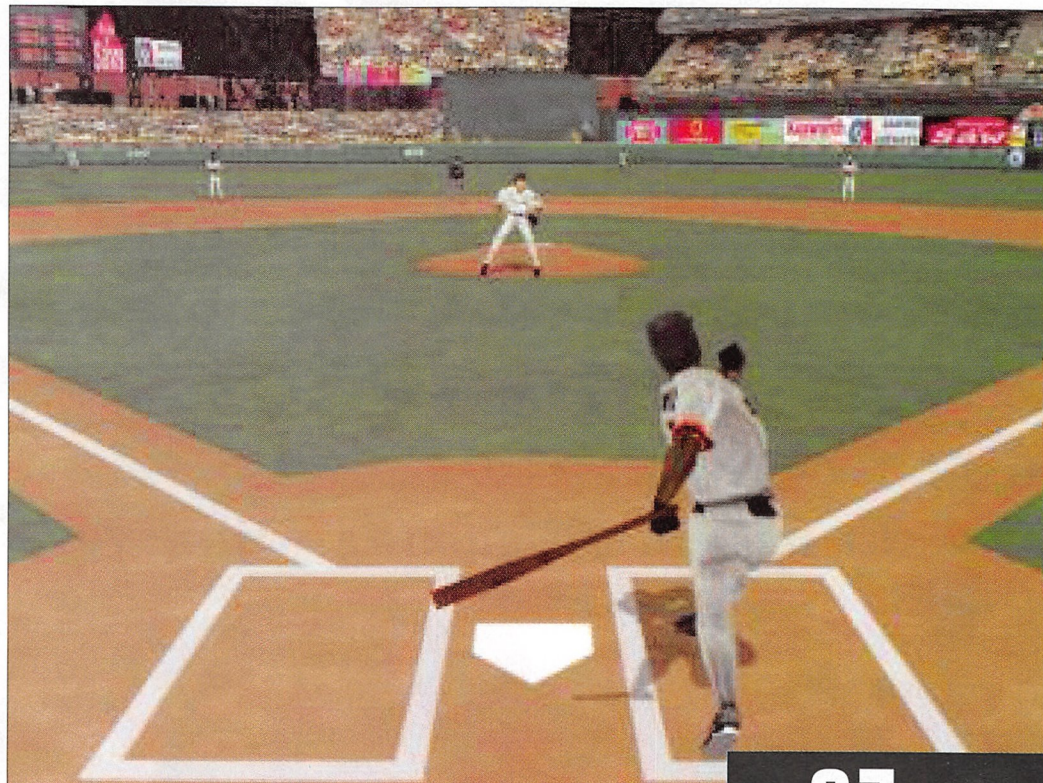
"A long time ago somebody hits a ball with a stick to pass the time. Pastime becomes game, game becomes competition.... and over the years baseball creates legends" - so begins the impressive intro sequence for TP99. And as far as Baseball games go, this is one of the best, ever.

Managerial mode

It's not just the very nice graphics that makes the game, though they are suitably impressive. The motion capture is, as usual, spot on and the players are animated superbly, but it's the depth, variety and playability of the game itself that really takes it to the next level. I'm not really a hardcore Baseball fan,



but this was just so much fun to play, the learning curve was just right, the controls intuitive, and the variety in ways I could play just added to the effect. You have 5 modes of play to choose from; a full season, a one-off exhibition match, a home run challenge between selected players, the playoff series, as well as a full career mode, where you



It might be boring in real life, but as a computer game, baseball rocks!

just keep playing until you decide to stop. And on top of all this, you can also play in managerial mode, where you can decide the nitty gritty details of just about every move on the field, from the pitch that's thrown to the field placement, to trades, drafting, and everything in between.

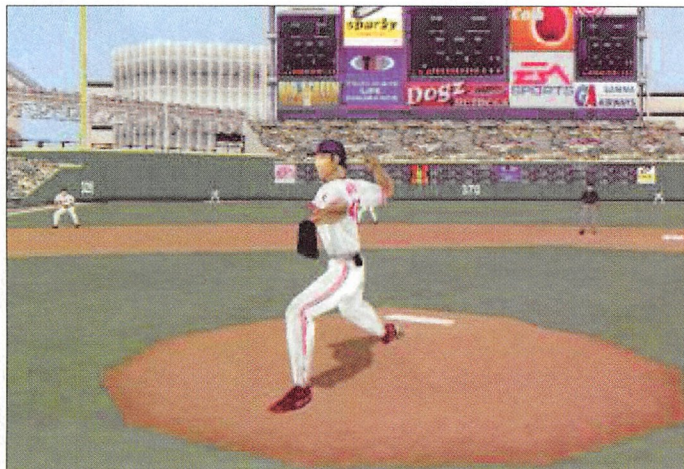
Buggyball

Add to this the commentary that actually isn't (too) annoying, but often helpful, and you've got

yourself an instantly involving game with enough statistics to keep even the most anal Baseball fan engrossed.

The only things holding me back from thinking about a 90%+ is the alarming number of bugs in the initial release (EA have already released a patch, though it makes you wonder what else might require fixing), and though the option for TCP/IP play is finally available, it will only work for managerial games, and EA's game matching server is, at best, rudimentary (and they still don't use DirectPlay for modem games either).

Gareth Jones



87%

Category Baseball sim
Players 1-4
Publisher EA Sports
Price \$79.95
Rating G
Available Now

For A comprehensive baseball arcade and management sim, with options for almost everything you could wish for.

Against Limiting multiplayer to 4 players at the most, full TCP/IP support, and a high class dedicated online game server.

Need P90, 16MB RAM, 4x CD

Want P166, 64MB RAM, 12x CD, 3Dfx, 6 (or more) button gamepad

WORLD LEAGUE SOCCER 98

The quest for the perfect PC soccer game continues. Silicon Dreams pick up the ball EA Sports dropped.

Silicon Dreams know their stuff. WLS 98 is a very impressive football game, and apart from a few inconsistencies, is right up there challenging EA and Actua's dominance in the football sim market. The motion capture is, if anything, better, the players move more fluidly, and the team management menus are certainly much better than those offered with EA's FIFA. Also, the commentators are understated and usually accurate in their comments, the control method is simple and intuitive yet powerful enough for complex moves, and all over WLS just oozes quality and playability in spades.

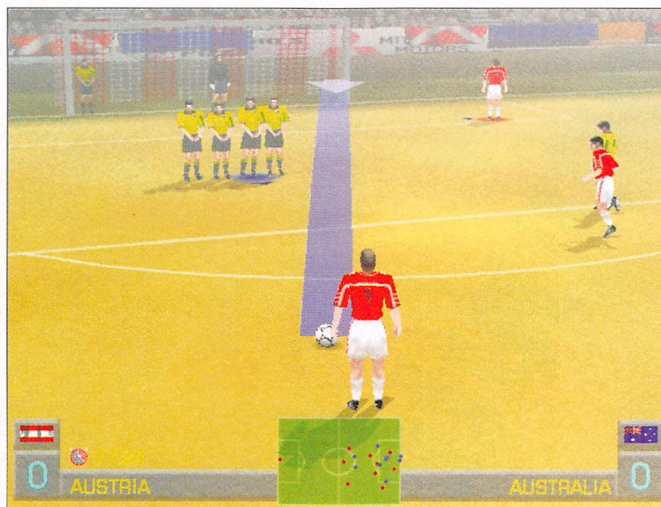
Fake player names...

It's not the perfect football sim though, not by any means. There are a number of areas that could be improved upon. Firstly, and most annoyingly for me, is the lack of real player names. Now, I understand that there's probably oodles of money involved in acquiring the rights to use the authentic names of players, sponsors and teams, and for huge megacorporations like EA (with quarterly revenues of around US\$200 million) this isn't such a stretch, but for smaller software houses it may just not be worth it.

Even so, I did find it very annoying to control Robbie Fowler rather than Robbie Fowler, or Paul Whinace rather than Ince, or Paul Oaken, and so on, though you can manually change players names to reflect real life if you want to.

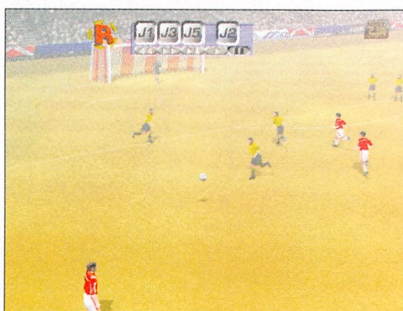
Les Ferdinand

The game engine itself is very impressive however. The motion capture is excellent, and though



Les Ferdinand was used as the model for the wire framing the developers have used 'skeleton' based animation, which allows them to stretch the figures any way they like (so they can make players short, tall, chunky, skinny, etc), and the level of detail and smoothness in the movements is really some of the best I've seen in any game.

It's not just the players either - the game can be stopped at any point for a replay, and viewed from any players perspective, or the referees, or the linesman, or even a completely free cam. And to top it all off, the replay menu is simple, functional, and craps all over EA's efforts with FIFA.



Speed adjustable!

However, it's not all good. In terms of gameplay, WLS is let down a little (though it does have its positive points). For starters, there doesn't seem to be any way to select which player you control - it's totally up to the computer as to who you control. Needless to say, this is less than satisfactory (although the version I'm

reviewing didn't come with any documentation, and there may be some arcane key to press to select a player). There is a good variety of moves for your players to perform though, and the key controls are nicely done too. It's, once again, a simple interface, and doesn't require key combinations to perform special moves or the like. However, because of this, it can be hard to time your moves properly - pressing the button for header/pass/tackle when the ball is in the air, if not timed correctly will result in a slide tackle rather than an attempt at a header, and this can be very frustrating. But the game speed is variable (a very nice touch) to your liking, from insanely slow to super fast, though this can't be changed during a game, only before.

But I'm in a quandary. In many ways, WLS 98 is better than FIFA 98/WC - the menu system certainly, the animation and options available (though no TCP/IP play with WLS either, dammit), and the control method is different but still works well, mostly. Still, the gameplay lacks that final polish that FIFA has, with crisp passes, shots, and tackles and that oh-so-important football feeling. I just didn't quite get the same level of closeness to realism and exciting gameplay that FIFA gave me, though WLS is still a top quality game.

Gareth Jones



Hey look! It's a menu that's easy, simple and functional. Who would have thought we'd see that!

85%

Category Football sim
Players 1-4 (IPX/same computer)
Publisher Eidos/Silicon Dreams
Price TBA
Rating G8+
Available Now

For Great player animation, variable game speed, nice menus, and a good variety of teams to play as and ways to play (exhibition, world cup, league, etc).

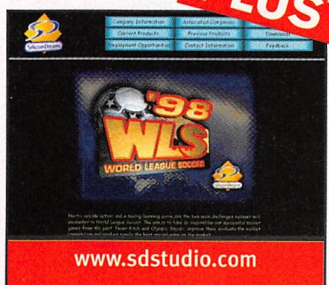
Against Gameplay is a little too arcadey for my liking (though only a little), and no real player names. Computer controls who you are in charge of, and this doesn't work as well as it could, also the tripling up of action keys means that sometimes your player won't do what you want him to.

Need P90, 16Mb RAM, Win 95, 4 x CD

Want P166, 32Mb RAM, 3D accelerator

3D SUPPORT

3Dfx Glide, Direct 3D



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WARBREEDS

Not content with just a straight Warcraft clone, developers are beginning to innovate...



At this stage, for an RTS game to have an impact at all, it really has to be something special either in terms of grandiose graphics and gameplay (a la Total Annihilation), or innovative and detailed race design coupled with old school soul (as with Starcraft). Warbreeds has neither of these attributes, and although the developers have attempted to play around with the standards of the genre by introducing a 'design your own unit' option, it seems very unlikely that this will set the world afire.

Cloned sheep take over world

The plotline, however, is nicely detailed, and even has a subtext that reflects back upon us and the burgeoning debate over genetic engineering. The planet Aeolia, over countless millennia, developed a number of lifeforms, the most developed of which is the Yedda. As the species developed, tamed the land and made scientific advances, they discovered their own theory of evolution.

As the Yedda continued to advance, they discovered ways to create and mutate other lifeforms to their specific needs. However, (and here's the cautionary tale, kids) gradually the slaves developed (or were given) more intelligence, and one rebel



group of the Yedda even deliberately tried to create a race of super creatures. The end result, as you've probably guessed, was that the genetically engineered creatures eventually became self-determining and killed their masters. Thus began the battle for supremacy.

Grow your own power

You begin with a few scattered units and a couple of 'Shaman' (the intelligent guys that can build stuff). On each map there are scattered areas of land which can be planted with pods that grow to cover all the arable land. Each of the clans can harvest the 'power' of the pods by erecting a refinery with a Shaman. And so it goes, with an assortment of offensive, defensive, and factory like structures that are all dependant upon the refineries. Rather than head out and gather resources, you cultivate them and then convert them into energy, which is used by your gene factories to create your units, to build defensive installa-

tions, research stations, and so on.

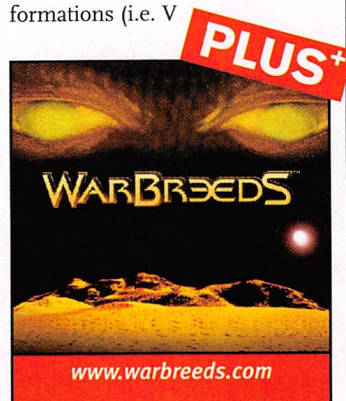
35,000 warrior combinations

It's the actual creation of your units that's the main selling point of the game, and one of the nicest features (if a little overestimated by the blurb - "Create over 35,000 warrior combinations", it screams). Essentially what happens is that each race has 5 types of creatures at their disposal, and each has a number of 'hardpoints' that

weapons can be mounted upon. At the beginning of the single player scenarios, obviously enough, your options are fairly limited, but as things progress more and more types of weaponry become available. Also, your Shamans [sic] can scavenge DNA from conquered foes, and then develop weapons from it, which makes even more varieties of armaments available.

Stupid Units

It's a nice idea, and well executed, but there are too many negatives within the game that outweigh the positive points. Units are incredibly dumb, and all too often end up getting stuck behind mountains and the like. You can set waypoints and patrols, but even so this aspect should have been markedly improved. And then there's the 'feature' that allows you to set formations (i.e. V



shaped, straight, circular, etc) for your troops, which isn't very useful at all, and falls into the 'gimmick' category.

Nothing New

Other than that, it's a pretty bog standard RTS game, you manage your resources, build troops and defenses, and then send out said troops to attack the opposition. The innovation of arming your troops as you see fit is nice, but it's not enough to rescue this game from mediocrity. It's, sadly, just another one to add to the ever growing pile.

Gareth Jones

54%


Category Real time strategy
Players 1-4 (IPX)
1-2 (modem, TCP/IP, serial)
Publisher Broderbund
Price \$TBA
Rating G8+
Available Now

For You're given the ability to tailor the weapons of your troops to your needs, which is nice, and it supports video modes up to 1280 x 1024.

Against Apart from the build your own troops aspect, there's just not a lot there to differentiate this from the plethora of average RTS games out there and consequently unless you've missed the RTS boat up until now, it's just not worth bothering about.

Need P90, Win 95, 16MB RAM, 4X CD

Want P133, 32MB RAM



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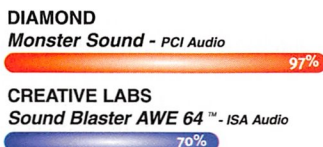
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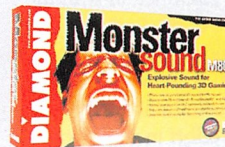


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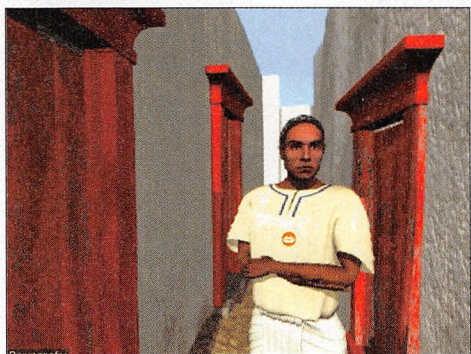
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EGYPT 1156 B.C.

Following Atlantis and Versailles, Cryo now let us explore the wonders of the Pyramids in 3D.

For those unaware of their history, Cryo are a French games company who seem to specialise in lushly beautiful adventure games that are just that little bit left of centre. From Versailles and Atlantis (which were very good) to Dragon Lore and its sequel (which weren't), they create apparently traditional adventures nudged askew by stylised visuals and decidedly odd stories and locations.

Despite this, or perhaps for this very reason, their game worlds are without exception superbly realised and a joy within which to lose yourself. Yes, I love Cryo games (even the crap ones). But do I love Egypt?



Awesome visuals

Like Versailles, Egypt has been designed in conjunction with the clever people of the Louvre Museum, and so the level of detail in, and accuracy of, the locations is astounding. Cryo's painstaking effort to recreate Egyptian tombs and villages as they actually were 3000 years ago has been well rewarded with some frequently awesome visuals.

With the exquisite dusk light filtering through the trees casting a myriad of reflections on the water below, the courtyard pool scene in the House of Panehesy is just incredible. Even less spectacular settings, such as the dark corridors in the tombs themselves, are suitably evocative and immersive.

Escape execution

The Omni 3D engine is again utilised well, but sadly not to the full. At each scene you can swing the mouse to look all around (just



like in Quake), but the scrolling transitions from scene to scene are absent. Instead, when you walk forward the

new scene will fade in over the old one. It's disappointing and occasionally disorientating.

As far as the story is concerned, Egypt proves quite interesting. Your father has been accused of a crime he surely did not commit - the robbery of a sacred tomb. Given that there is only a short period of time before his execution, you have to quickly gather evidence to prove his innocence. Granted, the story does unfold in a linear fashion, but it's engaging enough that this isn't a concern.

Your task mostly involves talking to the various characters you encounter and discovering the vital clues as to who really did steal the tomb's treasure. There are some fairly tricky situations to get your head around, but the lack of desperate "sliding block" style puzzles eases the burden and increases your enjoyment in equal amounts. Sadly, it's all over far too swiftly and,

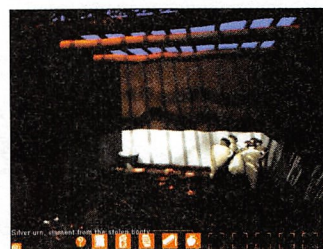
although good while it lasts, Egypt doesn't really offer anything new. I had a distinct feeling of *deja vu* whilst playing.

Small leap backward

You know the saying that "if it ain't broke, don't fix it"? Well, despite being apposite in certain situations, obviously it should not be read as license to stand still. And with the breathless pace of the gaming industry, standing still is akin to taking major leaps backward. In other words, just because something works, does not mean it cannot work even better. Ultimately, Egypt fails to improve upon Cryo's previous adventures and clearly suffers for it.

A decent game, then, which will please (and yet slightly displease) any Cryo fan.

David Wildgoose



"Like I was saying to Barry just the other day; we gotta stop these kids putting graffiti on everything! What're people going to think in a couple of thousand years when they dig us up?!"

77%

Category Adventure
Players 1
Publisher Cryo Interactive
Price \$TBA
Rating G
Available Now

For Splendid graphics and music. Setting is detailed and fascinating.

Against Way too short.

Need P90, 16Mb RAM, 4xCD

Want Nothing special

3D SUPPORT

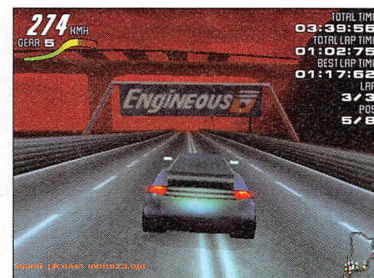
Software only

MOTORHEAD

Besides being a fast and fun arcade racer, Motorhead manages to run well on slower PCs. Gotta love that.



hidden tracks which become available after you've won every race), and until you enter a tournament and win on the currently available tracks you won't be able to access the others. I did find this to be a tad annoying, because it does take a while to get the hang of each track. However, when you do eventually conquer the initial tracks, better cars become available along with the new tracks (although the computer drivers also get better cars too).



adrenaline rush coupled with a reasonably accurate driving model and decent AI, along with a great suite of multiplayer options, you could do a lot worse than Motorhead.

Gareth Jones

Unbreakable cars

Also, no matter what you do to your car you can't damage it, nor can you damage other cars. Running smack bang into a wall at 280km/h won't affect your car's performance at all. It doesn't really taint the gameplay all that much, and you can use other cars as 'braking aids' around corners (i.e run into them to a) slow you down and b) push them out of the way) - in Motorhead this is a legitimate manoeuvre.

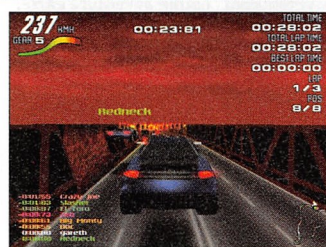
So, for those who are after an authentic recreation of motorcar racing, Motorhead will probably taste a little light. But for those after a very fast paced

Motorhead falls further towards the arcade thrash-about category than towards a realistic simulation, but once you get into the game it does become an addictive and immersive experience, and is well worth a look if you're into racing games.

The most striking aspect is undoubtedly the engine. On our testing machine (P2 266/64MB/3Dfx Voodoo 1) it ran incredibly smoothly, especially in 3Dfx mode, and looked very nice too. But with the developer Digital Illusion's proprietary software game engine, it looked just as good if not better, and ran at a playable framerate up to around 1024 x 768. Needless to say, unless you have a very high spec machine, software mode is really only going to be playable at around 640 x 480 but even so this still looks great.

A bit pretend...

The meat and potatoes of any racing game is the driving model, and though Motorhead is an unashamedly fun and fast experience rather than a hard core simulation the driving model is both at once easy and simple to get the hang of, as well as realistic enough not to dissuade those wanting a more real life feel. Though at first it might seem tempting and fun to powerslide around corners (and it is),



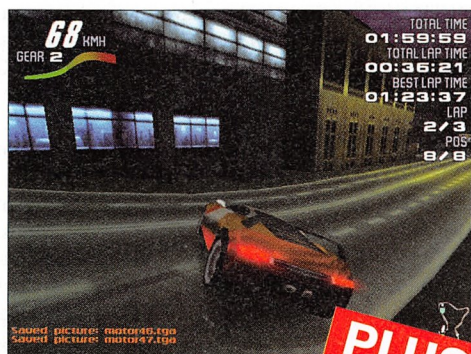
It's got all the signs of a console game, but that's not necessarily a bad thing anymore

to get the best results you will need to approach the corners so that you hit them at their apex and take the racing line.

Even on easy mode, the AI drivers will dice and challenge you for places - they don't just pick a line and stick to it, which is very refreshing. And they are quite good too, this isn't the kind of game that you can just pick up and start winning right from the start. You will need to run through the courses at least a couple of times to familiarise yourself with the corners and such.

Track lock

But here we arrive at one of the less impressive aspects of the game, and one that betrays the arcade style origins of Motorhead. Firstly there are only 6 tracks (plus one or two



83%

Category Arcade Racing
Players 1-8 (TCP/IP, Modem, IPX, Serial)
Publisher Gremlin
Price \$89.95
Rating G8+
Available Now

For Extremely impressive engine, detailed and smooth. Good driving model with AI drivers that provide a worthy challenge, and tracks that aren't too hard but still require time and skill to master.

Against Limited number of tracks, and a somewhat annoying tournament feature that requires too much repetition to be really enjoyed.

Need P90, 8Mb RAM, Win 95, 4 x CD

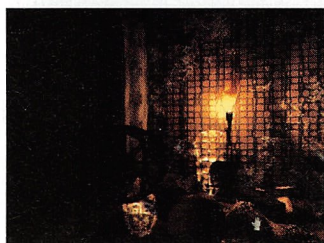
Want Will run fast on P90 or higher.

3D SUPPORT
Direct 3D and Glide

OF LIGHT & DARKNESS

We often complain about the lack of true originality in games. Here's one that's virtually new in every way.

Between Heaven and Hell there exists a Twilight Zone type village of the damned. No it's not an eternity of watching those humorous little dances Kerri-Anne Kennerley performs at the beginning of the Midday Show. Instead this is a place for the ghosts of Mankind's biggest perpetrators of the Seven Deadly Sins. From early great achievers such as the horse loving Roman Emperor Caligula to modern day greats like serial killer John Wayne Gacy. Gar Hob, Dark Lord of the Seventh Millennium has decided that having the coolest name in town is no longer enough, it's time to make sure that New Year's Eve 1999 has a larger than expected fireworks display. Humanity's only hope in averting catastrophe is sending the "Chosen One" into the village of lost souls on a mission to redeem the horrid sinners.

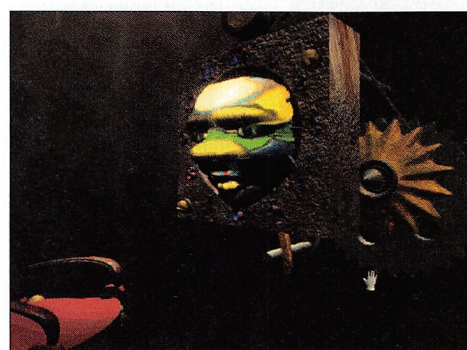
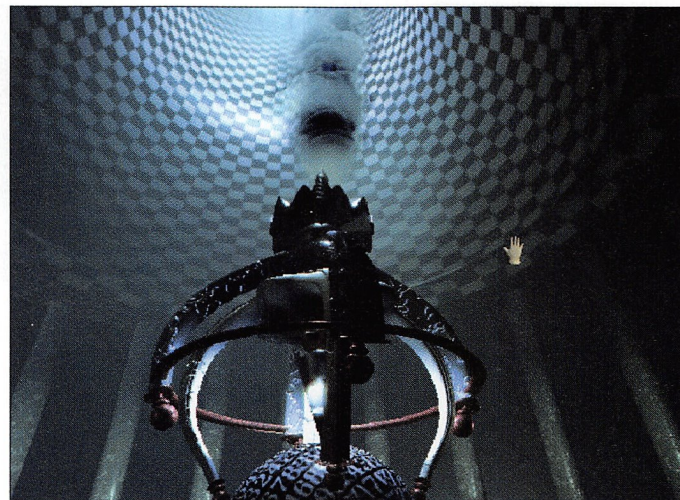


Oh no! It's the Apocalypse!

This Game has nice adventure plotline and is backed up by some impressive visuals. You move around the game Zork Nemesis/Myst style, with lots of beautiful pre-rendered scenery that defies easy categorization. Rooms either take the theme of varying Apocalyptic endings



www.oflightanddarkness.com
-Extra orb powerups available on website.



OL&D is actually quite close to being an interesting adventure game, but the timed plot doesn't help at all

where you must either use teleporting amulets (they are littered around the village) to zap yourself to another less haunted room, or use the precious

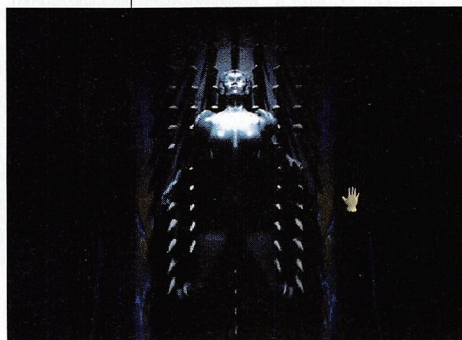
(Global warming, plague, it's all here) or are based on one of the seven deadly sins. It's worth a visit to the room of lust, just for the sound effects.

Instead of the usual solving of mechanical puzzles to advance, OL&D takes a weird twist in play. Each tortured soul owns an artifact which is hidden somewhere within the many rooms of the village. You must gather these artifacts, plus coloured orbs of power which are dotted around the place. It's then a case of combining the artifact with the correct combination of coloured orbs in the room that represents the sin that the soul specialized in.

Real Time Adventure

You are free to move about the village, with the only impediment being evil souls popping up from time to time blocking your way demanding their artifacts back. This is

coloured orbs to temporarily scare them away. The real challenge in the game is matching what artifacts belong to what souls, and to which sin they are condemned by. You have to deduce this by reading the sinners' biographies in the manual, and listening to their victims at the Armageddon Clock. The Clock is not only a wailing wall but acts as a countdown timer, for OL&D is a Real Time Adventure. Every now and then a polite female voice will initiate a one minute countdown, if you don't use a red, green and blue orb to temporarily scare a ghostie it's the end of the world. You lose, start again.



Fallen angel subplot

Think of OL&D as more of a puzzle game than an adventure. Even with all the flashy graphics, excellent voice acting and surreal locations, all your attention is focused on backtracking from room to room collecting amulets, making sure you don't get caught without orbs when the all too regular countdowns occur. It even got to the point where I was skipping the FMV of a fallen angel subplot because I was more concerned with running afoul of the clock.

This is OL&D's biggest problem. With such a grand storyline, events feel cheapened by the perpetual "hunt the object" gameplay which gets very frustrating with the timed element. There's an option to cruise around the game, without the timer and minus all the ghosts for pre-game exploration purposes but I didn't really care in the end. OL&D would have been a great adventure game but it's best suited to puzzle diehards that sleep with their Rubik's Cubes.

Pete Sharpe

60%

Category Puzzle/Adventure
Players 1
Publisher Interplay
Price \$TBA
Rating M15
Available Now

For Excellent eerie atmosphere through clever use of wacky graphics and sound. Original twist on the adventure format but...

Against ...the adventure element is drowned out in repetitive puzzle solving.

Need P90, 16Mb RAM, WIN95.

Want P133, 32Mb RAM.

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PLANE CRAZY

Race fixed wing aircraft through a death-defying stunt course at 500k's per hour! Sounds like fun? Sign here, son!

Plane Crazy involves racing small, powerful aircraft through a maniacal, low-altitude landscape, using weapons, shortcuts, or whatever means necessary to cross the finish line first. It plays intuitively, like any thumb-candy arcade hit, and this is exactly the kind of audience Plane Crazy is aimed at.

Pure arcade

The planes are responsive, fast and generally react well, but don't expect your flight sim expertise to pay off much, there seems to be a complete absence of gravity, and of course there are no rudder controls for finite manoeuvring. A good command of the airbrake function will see you through almost any hardship, as well as timely usage of the in-game powerups and landscape destruction tricks.

You have three dirt-disruption type bombs on board at the beginning of each race, which you can use at particular intervals to explode weak points in a bridge, or rock formation, causing it to collapse and create an obstacle/cataclysm of death for the other racers. The powerups are best related to a console (gasp) game, (namely Mario Kart 64), in that you receive a random bonus on collection and they range from invincibility and speed-ups through to shock

bombs, speed dampeners and controls reversal to inflict on your opponents.

Stay low

As you fly, your "pit crew" give you advice and information on what you're doing wrong, including constantly telling you to fly lower because as everyone knows, the lower you fly, the faster you fly(?!). I'm assuming this has something to do with air density and not the artificial flight ceiling which prevents you from going above 500 metres or so.

Customize

As you progress through the Championship races, you earn cash to upgrade your plane, and improve it's top speed, handling, etc. You also have the option of customizing the model of plane you fly, and choosing the textures to be used on each segment part of it, but not, strangely, the in-flight characteristics or behaviour. The differences, sadly, are purely cosmetic.

Secret Passages

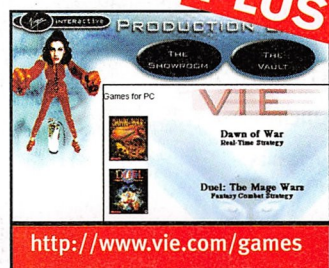
There are seven in-game levels, with varying degrees of difficulty, and obstacle density. A particularly cool feature is the multiple paths that you can take within

any level, with respective levels of death risk. In this way, you can catch up considerably on the race, by bravely risking imminent destruction, not that there is any real detriment to crashing into the landscape and exploding in a colourful shockwave. You simply



Pure & simple arcade fun is what it's all about and we respect it for that

70%	
Category	Arcade flight sim
Players	1-8 (Lan, Modem, Serial)
Publisher	Europress
Price	\$89.95
Rating	G
Available	Now
For	Awesome 3D graphics, good replay value and fun, intuitive gameplay.
Against	Shameless denial of physics, not enough levels.
Need	P166, Win95, 16 Megs RAM, Directx5, 4x CDROM, 2 Meg SVGA video card
Want	3Dfx for accelerated play
3D SUPPORT	
Native 3Dfx, Direct 3D	



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World League Basketball

CATEGORY Sports

PLAYERS 1-4

PUBLISHER Mindscape

PRICE TBA

RATING TBA

AVAILABLE Now

NEED Pentium, 16 Mb RAM, Win 95

WANT P 150, 32 MB RAM

overall

58%

I'd almost recommend this to those serious about basketball. And to those that take their fun seriously, in a dead-pan kind of way.

Are you the kind of computer basketball player that prefers a game that plays more like the real sport? Read on. Mindscape's World League Basketball is a step in a rather different direction than most of the other basketball titles of late. Attempting to cater for the harder to please audience that doesn't mind taking a hit to fun as long as the reality meter is turned all the way up, WLB has got a lot going for it. On the flip side, WLB also has plenty to overcome.

Most notable are the graphics. If it were 1994, these graphics would have blown me away! It is however, the last I checked, 1998. Amongst the current crop of 3D accelerated basketball games, WLB can be a very easy game to overlook just in the graphics department. The animations too belong to an age gone by. Rather crude and simplistic, they again pale in comparison to the new age of flashy sports sims. However, they also serve their purpose well, with the player hardly ever being in doubt as to what the hell is going on

screen at any given moment. This is not the problem though.

WLB laughs in the face of NBA association, drops the TV style presentation, and gives the player just one playable viewing perspective - from the sideline. After



Graphics don't maketh the game, but it's a shame when the wooden floor looks prettier than everything else

That is, of course, if you happened to have been playing a side that's evenly matched in the stats department. Yep, WLB suffers from a severe case of unbalanced gameplay. Playing against a dud team is painless, beating the ladder leaders is improbable. At times too, the AI was a laugh, which in a game like this, can really ruin things.

WLB isn't a complete disaster, it just falls short of it's potential. Realism in a game like this is a good thing, but it should never be at the expense of fun.

March Stepnik



repeated play, you begin to appreciate the fact that you can't repeatedly nail 3-pointers. That fatigued players will perform abysmally, that to win a game you'll have to pull off a near perfect display of teamwork. Satisfaction from beating a team is immense, and there are virtually no cheap wins here.

Beast Wars

CATEGORY Action Adventure

PLAYERS 1

PUBLISHER Hasbro Interactive

PRICE \$79.95

RATING M

AVAILABLE Now

NEED P100, 16MB RAM, 4X CD

WANT A better game.

overall

43%

A derivative, drab, and rather boring effort to cash in upon the popularity of a cartoon series. Very little in the way of gameplay to keep you interested.

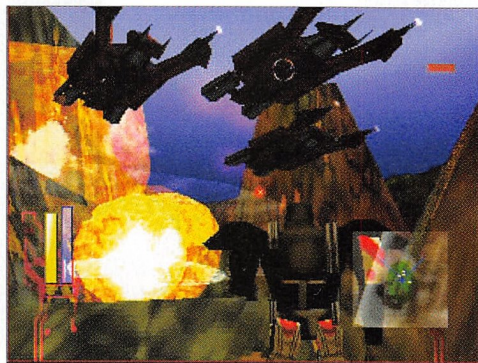
Hasbro, kings of the spin-off game, have shown that they're not afraid to try and cash in upon the popularity or appeal of a TV show, movie, or board game. Witness the amazingly bad derivatives of Monopoly they've been unleashing upon unsuspecting consumers lately, like Stars Wars Monopoly and 'Monopoly World Cup France 98' edition.

But it's not just board games that Hasbro are willing to take a punt on. The Transformers cartoon has been around for ages now, long enough to have been a part of my growing up experience. And given the lasting popularity (for reasons I cannot even begin to fathom), it has spawned another cartoon called Transformers: Beast Wars, which has in turn now spawned a computer game of the same name.

But is it any good? Well, in a word; no. It's not terribly pathetic, it's not a complete waste of a game - though it comes pretty close. To begin with, it's aimed squarely at the children's market, and presumably those children that are fans of the cartoon.

The gameplay is sort of a mix between Tomb Raider and Quake, with a third person view but a 'shoot anything that moves' approach required.

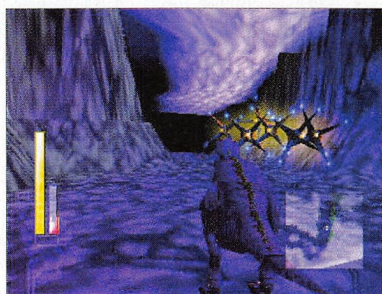
Graphically, it's a bit off-putting because your avatar seems to glide over the surface rather than walk on it, and when you transform into a beast (to conserve your energy, for some reason) the animation is decidedly average. And then



there's the aiming system - you do get a crosshair, but can only move it left and right, not up and down so you end up shooting into the ground a lot rather than at the enemies.

So, unless you are a big fan of the cartoons, there just isn't much to get or keep you interested. I became thoroughly bored playing this within 15 minutes, and I find it hard to believe that even fans will be getting their moneys' worth from Beast Wars. One for the console kiddies perhaps, but even so, there are far better games of this ilk out there.

Gareth Jones



In the future, billions of dollars will be slashed from the Anti-Nuclear Defence Initiative budget to make giant robots that can transform into dinosaurs. A logical military strategy, I'm sure you'll agree

Mastermind

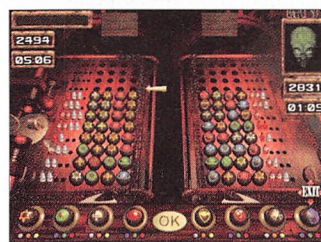
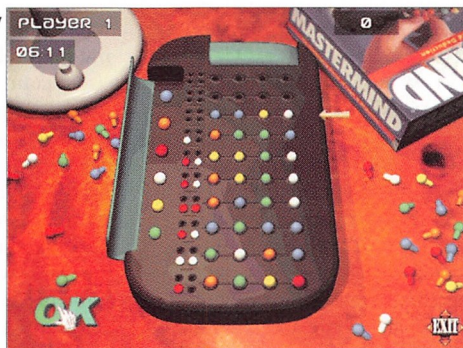
Having mastered the intricacies of Snakes & Ladders and quite easily cracked the complex mechanism behind Connect Four (I'm not referring to the blue frame that held the red and yellow checkers in place either), I was being weaned from Chinese Checkers in preparation for the next step in the natural progression of things - Mastermind. Mastermind was that game that the bigger people played, and involved a lot of brooding with occasional eruptions by both players of either extreme anger or pure exaltation. A complete mystery, Mastermind represented a coming of age. This was about the same time that Game & Watches appeared on the scene, and was the time I was introduced to the Vic 20. Needless to say, I, like many people, never took the big step into the world of Mastermind.

Which is a pity, for Mastermind is quite an enjoyable game about logic, deduction and a bit of good luck. That's if you haven't really got anything

Mastermind was actually a government planted testing device to monitor ESP levels in seemingly normal members of the general public...

better to do. Played by two people, one player arranges a sequence of four coloured pegs (out of six possible colours), while the other player has 10 attempts at working out the sequence. After each attempt, the sequence holder lets the other player know just how close they are to cracking the sequence - a red peg for a correct colour and position, a white peg for a correct colour in the wrong position. Scintillating stuff!

Which brings me to ponder the strategy behind releasing Mastermind as a stand-alone title for the PC. Mastermind would be ideal as a part of a retro compilation of the games you thought you'd never see again, or perfect as a bundled-with-Win 95 short brain



scratcher when you've brutally overdone on Solitaire. Included in this package are a number of different versions of the game - some easier (for the kiddies) and some bordering on too hard.

Re-visit or discover the magic of this deservedly classic game.

March Stepnik

CATEGORY Puzzle/Board Game

PLAYERS 1-2

PUBLISHER Hasbro Interactive

PRICE \$TBA

RATING G

AVAILABLE Now

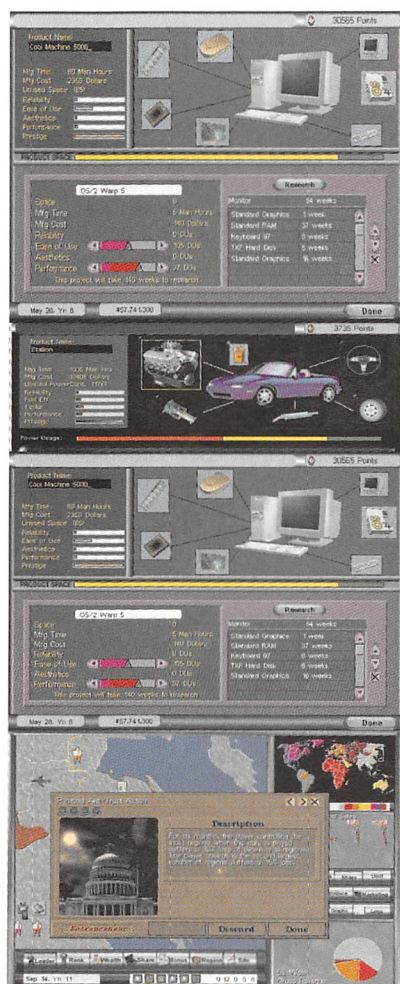
NEED Pentium, 16Mb RAM, Win 95

WANT Nothing Special

overall

71%

Not enough, but at the same time, too much. Pick it up from your local department store for \$15 before you decide this is the must have title for 1998.



Monotonous blood letting losing its charm?

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Conquering the world used to be a career choice limited to the military and deranged super-villians but times have changed . . .

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Mitrosoft
What do you want today?
(as if you have any choice)



Claw

CATEGORY	Platform
PLAYERS	1-Multi
PUBLISHER	Monolith
PRICE	\$TBA
RATING	G8
AVAILABLE	Now
NEED	P75, 16Mb RAM, 4xCD, Win95
WANT	nothing special

overall

62%

Why?

Whenever I review a game, I always try to criticise the game for what it is rather than what it's not. That is, I attempt to point out the faults present, instead of moaning about the lack of certain features. Sometimes it's easy - I wouldn't complain that Quake 2 lacks the resource management essential for decent gameplay, to cite an extreme example. No, I would point out the bugs in the initial release or that the AI still wasn't as good as it should have been.

Sometimes it's tough, however. Perhaps the simplest way to underscore how tough it can be at times would be to merely state the following - "Claw is a 2D platformer. In 1998." Convinced as I was that such titles disappeared with the last Ice Age, this news arrived as somewhat of a shock. Surely Monolith have played Mario 64, surely they've seen Tomb Raider, surely they've at least heard of Croc? Why anyone would even contemplate the notion that a 2D platformer is what the PC gaming world is

waiting for is beyond my comprehension.

Of course, that's not to say that Claw is a bad game. Competent is probably the appropriate term. For its type, Claw handles the job pretty well. Captain Claw himself is a charismatic enough hero.

Imprisoned by evil pirates at the start of the game, he escapes from his cell and begins a quest to recover the legendary Amulet of Nine Lives.

All the usual suspects are in position for the level line-up - castles, forests, caves, etc - and Claw has an array of pistols and cutlasses with which to engage the enemy. Intriguingly, there's even a multi-player option (for up to 64 players) where you race each other through a level, and a level editor for those with a willing friend and/or poor memory.

But no matter how slickly produced nor capably designed Claw may be, the one recurring



thought that came to me while playing was - this might have been an excellent 3D platformer. It's always valid to criticise a game for what it is; occasionally it's equally valid to criticise the same game for what it isn't.

David Wildgoose

Monopoly: World Cup France 98 Edition

CATEGORY	Monopoly
PLAYERS	1-6
PUBLISHER	Hasbro
PRICE	\$TBA
RATING	G
AVAILABLE	Now
NEED	Pentium, 16Mb RAM, 4xCD, Win95
WANT	P100, 32Mb RAM

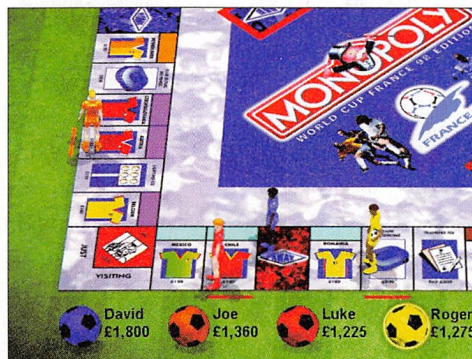
overall

45%

"Exceptionally pointless."

Tempting as it may be to dismiss Hasbro's latest football reincarnation of the aged and withering Monopoly (following on from the lamentable Star Wars Monopoly) as nothing more than a really bad idea that we should all just forget ever happened, it's not being particularly fair. Instead, justice will be served in a more effective way if I slag it off for two far more important reasons. One, having set out its stall as a footballised version of the venerable old board game, it just doesn't go far enough - there's not enough football here. Two, it plays a pretty crap game of Monopoly anyway.

So, let's see. Yes, the player tokens are animated footballers and - ooh, look! - they dribble a ball when moving around the board, passing it to the next player for their turn. Such imaginative visual frills seem a nice touch at first, but the time they take up soon palls and you vow to switch them off before you begin the next game (because, of course, you can't do so during the current game. Nnngh!). Gosh, the proper-



Some of the more cynical football fans might say that the great game was ruined by money, so maybe Football Monopoly actually makes sense...

ty squares have been replaced by footballing nations, so that now, for example, Mayfair is Brazil and Old Kent Road is Scotland.

Amusingly, when you get sent to "jail", your player is shown the red card and has to sit on a bench at the side of the board. But it still says "Go to jail" on the board, for some confusing reason.

Essentially all the rules are exact-

ly the same as per traditional Monopoly, bar some name changes here and there (taxes are now transfer fees, Chance and Community Chest are now Home and Away cards, etc) and the addition of a couple of trivial extras (matches are played so that, say, Argentina might beat Germany and they will swap values as a result).

And it's a waste of time playing against the computer players because they're utterly hopeless at trading. You can rip them off to a mindboggling extent and they still happily accept your offers. Tsk.

David Wildgoose

Mechwarrior 2 Titanium Trilogy

Remember the days when Activision still held the FASA licence and could base their mech games on the BattleTech multiverse, accumulating all the associated cred? These were the glory days of mech games, some say never to be repeated again.

Mechwarrior 2 is to mech games what Doom is to 3D shooters. Imagine, then, what would happen if you were to take Doom, and enhance it to take advantage of today's 3D hardware. This is what the Titanium Trilogy is - Mechwarrior 2, the Ghost Bear's Legacy expansion pack and Mercenaries with an enhanced graphics engine, all packaged together in a 3 CD-ROM set with one manual. The new versions of the games, as well as looking sexier are all Windows 95 native which makes multiplayer a breeze. Tops, non?

If you are one of the unfortunate souls who is yet to be convinced of the absolute need to obtain a 3D accelerator, Activision have even kindly included the original games, un-enhanced for



your pixelated enjoyment. Yes, now you too can laugh as you remember the graphics back in the days (all of 2 years ago) where 3D was a pipe dream.

This pack represents good value. If you own only one of the games in the trilogy, now is the time to buy the complete set. If you've never played Mechwarrior 2 or worse still, have never run around in a 40-foot tall steel tuxedo, now is the time to invest your time and money.

Some may say the Mechwarrior Titanium Trilogy is an attempt to polish a game that was near-perfect to begin with. Others will cynically call it a marketing gimmick to squeeze some extra dollars out of the punters until Heavy Gear II arrives. Granted, there are no new missions, weapons, 'mechs or in fact, anything at all, but the graphical enhancements and Win95 support justify the re-release.

George Argy

CATEGORY Mech Sim

PLAYERS 1-8

PUBLISHER ?????

PRICE \$49.95

RATING G8+

AVAILABLE Now

NEED P100, 16MB RAM, 200MB HDD, 2x CD-ROM (non-hardware version)

WANT P166, 32MB RAM, 200MB HDD, 4x CD-ROM, 3Dfx or Rendition

overall

86%

Excellent value for fans and those that have never played a Mechwarrior game.

Tomb Raider: Unfinished Business

One of the aims behind Unfinished Business apparently is to flesh out the existing story of Lara Croft's antics in Tomb Raider with a couple of new levels. Unfortunately, these reside on the second disc, so a seamless integration of the extra levels into the game as a whole is not existent. Instead, after having installed the full version of TR on disc one, you simply choose the extra levels from a menu and play at will.

At this point you're likely to wonder how it's possible to flesh out a rather threadbare story - because as most of you will agree, Tomb Raider could have worked without having to have a reason why a twenty-something scantily clad woman is running about in underground caverns. The answer is fiendishly clever - drop the price, include some promo material, and hope that nobody notices that the story was inconsequential in the first place.

TR: Unfinished Business is just that - unfinished business. No matter how much Lara Croft's popularity and appeal has been dissected and diluted



The nude Lara cheat? Oh, that's easy, just type !dn1lb og ll'uoy ro ti pots ! rekcus a tahW

by the masses - you put a young woman with a chest that defies all laws of gravity, showing plenty of leg, with guns a blazing on the cover of a game box and you have yourself unfinished business for months to come.

For the "Premier Collection" price, you get the full Tomb Raider game, the four extra levels (which are rather challenging and enjoyable), the 3D accelerator patches, as well as the real clincher in the deal - a Screensaver, a Calendar, and a

Desktop theme! To answer your questions - no, there aren't any candid stills of Lara hanging satin sheets on the line in nothing but a French maid's apron and underwear. Nor a chic just-out-of-the-shower look with towel wrapped around her head, making a song and dance of personal hygiene. Just images of Lara as suggestive as a G rating will allow.

And really, if this is enough to discourage you from purchasing what is still a classic adventure game with just a little too much undeserved hype, then shame on you.

March Stepnik

CATEGORY Action/Adventure

PLAYERS 1

PUBLISHER Eidos

PRICE \$49.95

RATING MA

AVAILABLE Now

NEED Pentium, 16Mb RAM

WANT 3D card

overall

68%

As appealing as it may seem to have a Lara Croft calendar residing on your desktop, this is only for those yet to experience Tomb Raiding.

COMPTON'S HOME LIBRARY; Australian Infopedia v3.0

Roadshow Interactive \$99.95

Most digital encyclopedias treat America as the centre of the universe, here's one that recognises our little island...

Everyone, at some point, will have to write something. And everyone will find occasions where they don't know how to spell a word (or if the word they're using actually means what they think), or want to use a slightly different word, or check their facts, or add in some spice to their essay. Commonly, you'd reach for your dictionary, or thesaurus, or encyclopedia, and so on, but since the boom of computers as home entertainment/productivity devices, there are many versions of CD based 'infopedia's'. Unfortunately, most of them are Americo-centric in the extreme, which isn't surprising given that country's penchant for mindless flag waving and their self-centred approach to world affairs.

Australianised

Compton have billed their latest reference collection as the 'Australian Infopedia' though, so you would think that the spelling, pronunciation and information contained therein would be tailored towards Australians. And, in some ways, it is. Both the (concise) dictionary, and the (concise) thesaurus are from Australia's own Macquarie series. And even though hard-core pedants would eschew the Mac for the weightier and more plenary Oxford, for most the Macquarie series should provide enough meanings, synonyms, and antonyms to fulfil your needs.

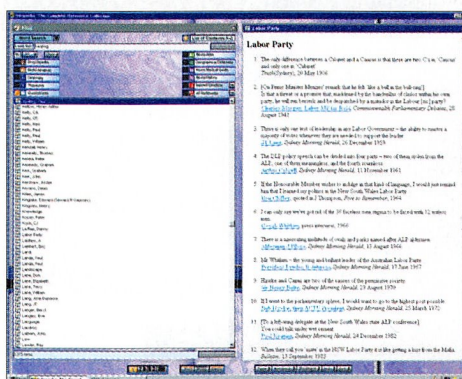
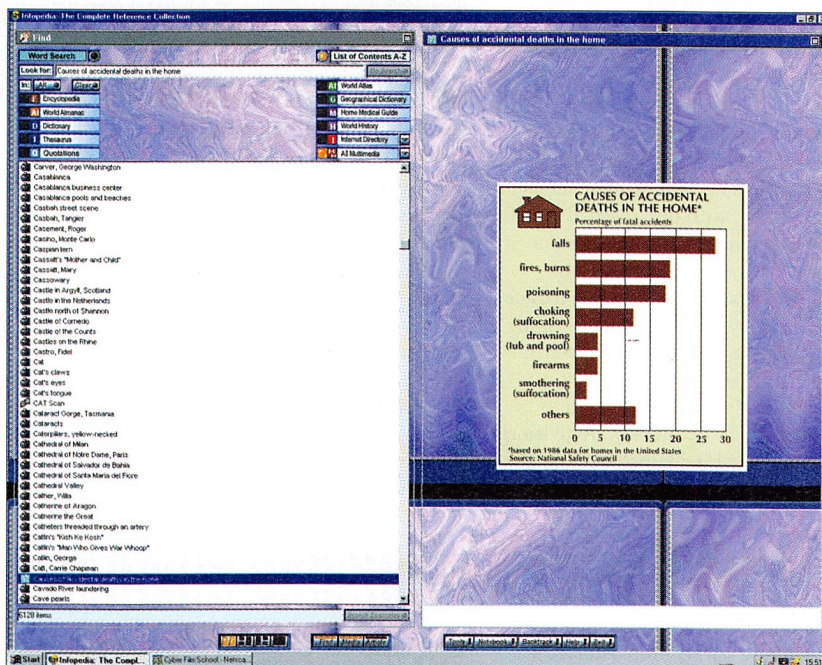
Genuinely useful

Other than the above three Australian products, however, you're left in a bit of a hole. The CD is a reference tool, and as such you should really only expect to refer to it occasionally, rather than

just flick through looking for 'interesting stuff'. The remaining tomes of wisdom are; Compton's Encyclopedia, a Geographical dictionary, World History, Medical Guide, Compton's World Atlas, World Almanac, and an internet site listing. With 9 volumes (albeit, in many cases, abridged versions) as you would expect the CD is pretty much jam-packed, and as such there aren't all that many multimedia experiences, mostly what you'll get is the odd picture with a couple of lines of text as a caption rather than moving diagrams and video clips.

Web links all round

The internet section is not all that useful either. Due to the transient nature of the web, quite a few of the pages listed have moved or died, and the types of links available aren't all that impressive either (not a single one for games!). A number of random searches (Brahms, modern art, Microsoft, games, gambling, and death) returned only one result (death.net). And there's no cross-linking from subjects in the other reference material (though admittedly it would be a herculean task) - a section on the Black Rhinoceros in the encyclopedia doesn't contain a link to a site about endangered African animals, for example.



Just a bit boring...

The interface for the program is fairly nicely laid out, with a number of options for how you want your windows displayed, and navigating around and finding results for specific enquiries is intuitive and easy, though it does perhaps look a little bland and cold. However, compared to many other more revered reference compendiums, it's attractively priced, and the bonus of the native Macquarie dictionaries, thesaurus and book of quotations should make this a decent choice for kids, students, and

It's interesting facts like these that might prompt you to wonder how someone accidentally smothers themselves

parents alike. It's just a pity that, should you decide to do a bit of searching, you're going to run into so much specific information about our economic and cultural mother country, the good 'ole US of A. For instance, the 'ten most dramatic sports events between November 1995 and October 1996' were; the Atlanta Olympics, the Chicago Bulls winning lots, The Baseball World Series, The Cowboys winning the superbowl, Tiger Woods winning the US Amateur golf tournament, the Colorado Avalanches winning the ice hockey cup, the winners of the US College gridiron cup, the winners of the US college basketball trophy, US Major League Soccer....and Steffi Graf winning three more grand Slam tennis titles. From sports to politics to world affairs, it's all pretty much like that....

Gareth Jones

BRAINSTORM'S Learn To Program BASIC

Interplay \$99.95 Rated: G Requirements: PC- P90, 16Mb RAM, Win '95, 2xCD. Mac- PowerPC, OS 7.5 or higher, 2xCD

Give your kids that vital head start in life - teach them programming instead of social skills.

Like most things in life, the earlier you start something, the better. Children, before they become disillusioned with the world, possess an innate curiosity and a startling ability to learn new things, far surpassing an adult's capability to learn.

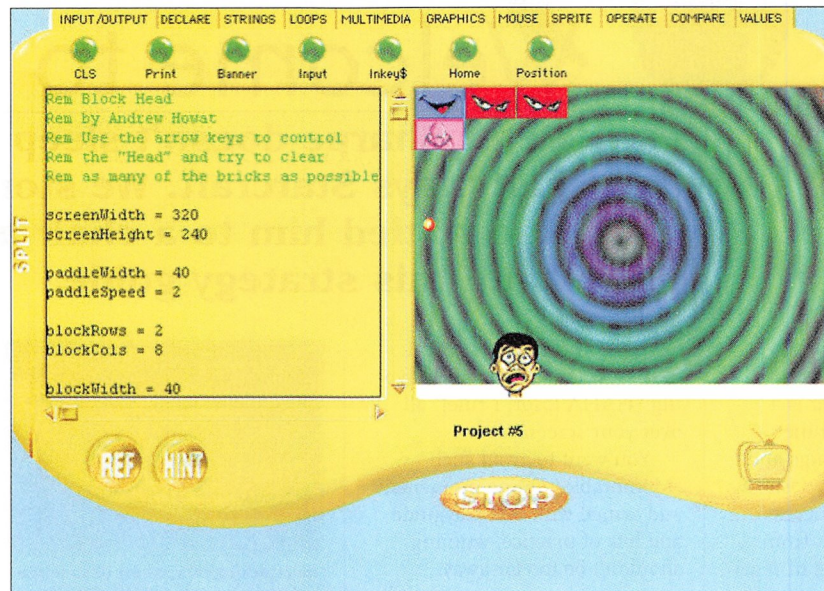
Makin' games

It's disappointing to me that I've never learnt to program properly in any form before, and now it's just too late to learn to any degree of proficiency. However, if I was twelve again, (and especially with computers as prevalent as they are now), a package which promised to teach the basics of BASIC would probably be a very attractive option, especially seeing as it purports to focus upon creating computer games.

BASIC (Beginners All purpose Symbolic Instruction Code) is, as the name suggests, a beginners programming language. It's a great way to get into programming because it introduces prospective programmers in the basics (no pun intended) of programming; applying logic, mathematics and introductory programming tenets.

Programming can be fun!

You might not think that learning to program computers would be a 'fun' experience, and it seems that Interplay would agree too. Rather than just use a bog standard inter-



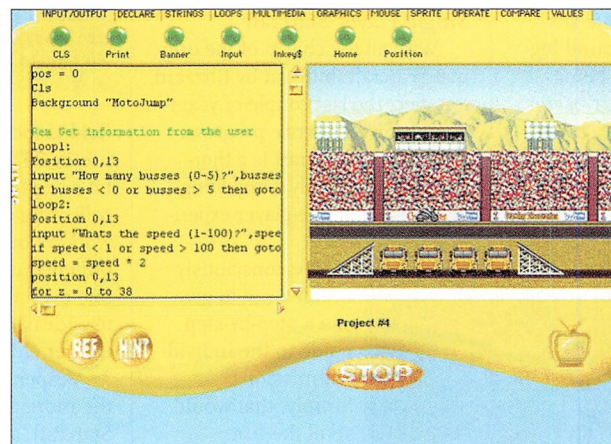
Not only is it fun to use, but it's an educational experience as well

face with some help files and the like, they have tried to make the package fun and interesting for kids. There's a very snappy introductory sequence, and a host with a CD for a head that pops up all the time with hints, tips and generally annoying things to say. He does say 'cool' a lot, and is a very energetic character, which is an approach that most kids television shows tend to take, so maybe kids find that entertaining rather than obnoxious and annoying (as I do). There's 10 lessons in all, each with a related pro-

sary which can be accessed at any time for when parts of a lesson aren't quite clear enough or you've just forgotten a command or some syntax. Similarly, when an incorrect line of code is written and you try to run the program a box will pop up highlighting the offending section and letting you know what's wrong with it - a great learning aid.

EZ to use

The interface is also nice and friendly. It's simple, versatile and friendly, and contains 'tabs' sections for common commands and the like for easy access. It really is a nice package, and should suit the kids with a burgeoning interest in the field of computer game programming, or even just programming

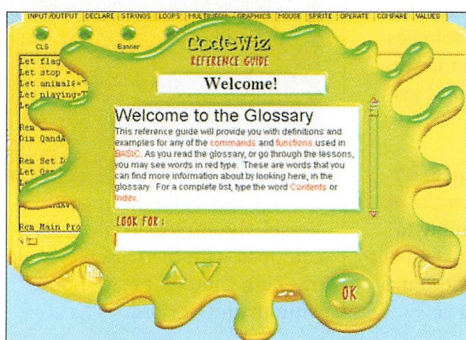


ject for the kids to play around with afterwards to put their learning into practice, and an assortment of other sub-tasks - 26 learning experiences in total. As you would expect, the lessons start at the beginning and gradually increase in complexity and build upon the previous lessons, starting from the first lesson where you're allowed to just have a bit of a fiddle with some code for a simple game (similar to Breakout), and then progressing to mathematics and so on. There's also a very handy glos-

in general. If you're a parent looking for something to occupy the little takers, so as to give you some peace and quiet for a change then this might be just the ticket.

And you never know, they might become master programmers and end in the same boat as the guys from id Software, who have so much money they don't know what to do with it. Imagine your child being that rich once he/she has grown up, and the style of living they could keep you in...

Gareth Jones



STARCRAFT

STRATEGY GUIDE

Welcome to the War

Peter Sharpe doesn't sleep anymore, he just plays Starcraft. We stormed his War Room, tied him to a chair and made him write this strategy guide.

Multiplayer Starcraft

Starcraft multiplayer is a fiercely competitive online arena, where all winnings and losses are recorded for posterity thanks to Battle.net. Success means grabbing a rank from amongst the thousands of registered players, instantly attracting members of the opposite sex and becoming an all round legend. Failure results in being subjected to seeing your base overrun time and time again

complete with horrid American teenagers typing "HAHA loser, I rule!" all over your screen.

You want to avoid such "Memorable" online moments, and armed with this playguide and lots of practice, winning shouldn't be too far away.

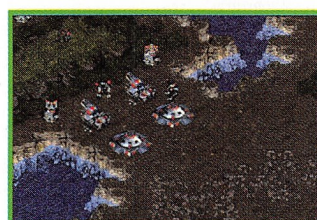
Single Player Starcraft

With all the charm of the original Warcraft, built on by Blizzard to reflect the last couple of years' worth of RTS-science progress, Starcraft is a thoroughly compelling single-player experience.

We consciously decided not to give you a step-by-step guide to the individual missions. Simply, that would spoil the fun. Instead, feast upon these tips'n'tactics and take them to battle. You will beat the game and still feel that special feeling of personal accomplishment - which is why we all get up in the morning, right?

Principles of War ECONOMY - Avoid the recession you don't have to have

Without a good resource strategy, even the best battle-



No attacking commander likes to see a chokepoint defended like this. Those bunkers are packed with trigger happy Marines, that can take out air targets as well.

field tactics are doomed to failure in RTS games. Starcraft is no exception to this rule. When collecting crystals, spread your workers out so they are not all bunched up trying to mine from one overcrowded mineral cluster. Ideally you want two workers per cluster.

Vespene Gas is needed for the more advanced troops in Starcraft, and healthy reserves of the green stuff will be very necessary for late game survival. Four miners doing the gas run is quite sufficient in maintaining a healthy stockpile early on. A second Vespene mine will have to be scouted for not too far into the game, as later technologies in all racial camps become very Vespene dependent. Don't get caught short.

HIDE'N SEEK -What you can't see will often bite you on the ass

Each race has the ability to cloak/hide units. Never send out a serious attack force without a detector of some sort. For

The Top Five Starcraft principles:

1. Never get so engrossed in building that you get lazy in sending consistent waves of attackers to enemy positions. This distracts the enemy, and helps you dictate the pace of the battle.

2. Map recon. If you don't know the lay of the land early on, a half decent opponent will get the jump on you when it comes time to expand territory.

3. Total Annihilation veterans beware. Starcraft's defenses will not stand up to long term defensive "Digging in" strategies. Starcraft is an offensive game, attacking play is of prime importance.

4. Quickly find out what race your enemy is using. Each side has distinct weaknesses, which you must take advantage of. Newbie players will often tell you what side they are using, take advantage of this naivete from the outset.

5. Use psychology and create a climate of fear. Comments as "Geez Battlecruisers look cool all grouped together!" often unsettles opponents.

Terrans this is the Science Vessel, the Protoss come equipped with the Observer and the Zerg shouldn't leave home without an Overlord.



Little do the Terrans know that some Zerg are burrowed-in up ahead. Let's hope these guys are not being moved with just the right mouse button...



Know these units well. For the Terran Science Vessel, Zerg Overlord and Protoss Observer are the essential keys in exposing hidden enemies.



PROTOSS

"Crush our opponent's minds and slash their arteries open. Then meditate and ponder why we are the best the universe has to offer." - Unusually humble Protoss warchief.

The Protoss are damn expensive and at times agonizingly slow in building units, but man for man the Protoss are the strongest. Heavily reliant on shield technology, always make sure you have at least two shield regenerators back at base to recharge your expensive troops. Resources are the biggest problem for the Protoss Commander, find the nearest mineral patch suitable for a second base as soon as possible. You will need it.

EARLY GAME Key Unit: Zealot

Forget any notion of a Zergling rush. Just build 4-5 Zealots and rush over to win against most unprepared newbies. It's a cheap tactic and terminally boring (as

well as being frowned upon by most players). Not recommended, especially against experienced players who won't fall for it.

For the average Protoss game you must build two Gateways, as the production time for Zealots and Dragoons is very slow. Don't bother about upgrading Zealot's strength/armour at this point, as they are already the strongest starter unit in the game and will easily kick the crap out of any Marine or Zergling. The Dragoon makes up for the Zealot's lack of range and air attack, but needs the backup of Zealots for close up assaults. Upgrading the Dragoon's range attack is highly recommended.

The Photon Tower has a strong attack strength, but it's slow rate of fire leaves it wide

open to swarming (especially by Zerglings) resulting in an easy takedown. Always keep Zealots on guard.

MID GAME

Key unit(s): High Templar, Reaver

The Templar is the spellcasting infantry of the Protoss. Hang him back behind a force of Zealots and Dragoons for the Hallucination effect and the troop crushing Psionic Storm. Hallucination is an undervalued part of the Protoss arsenal, as your enemy will no doubt waste time clicking on the phantom versions of your soldiers while the real-deal members of your squad do damage. A big bonus in any melee. Combining two Templars into the supremely fear inducing haul-ass Archon is not always recommended.

If you are playing against the Terrans and see a Science Vessel floating around, forget it. One EMP Shockwave and your most valued Archon is left with 10 measly hitpoints and will die if even only a nasty look is glanced his way. The Reaver is a devastating weapon playing a similar role to the Terran Siege Tank. Always keep defended by a squad of Dragoons/Zealots the long range Scarab explosives do a strong area damage that importantly doesn't affect your own units! Unleash, without a care in the world.



Always keep Reavers back from the action, as they are thin-skinned. It's also a good idea to protect your (expensive) Archons with some Zealot escorts.



This time there are no Zealot escorts, and thus even with Psionic Storm these High Templars will soon be toast. The Zealots are the backbone of the Protoss, no matter the occasion.



This outnumbered Protoss force has a good chance of repelling this Terran attack, as long as they replenish their shields with those shield batteries.

END GAME

Key Unit(s): Arbiter, Scout & Carrier.

Arguably the Arbiter and its area cloaking affect should be a priority earlier in the game. Its Vespene Gas cost can be prohibitive though, introduce as resources see fit.

Forget any wimpy associations with the word "scout". The Protoss Scout packs a wallop and can convincingly punch a hole through both a Terran Wraith or a Zerg Mutalisk. As with most Protoss gear, Scouts are very pricey and slow to build. If you want even a moderate force of Scouts you need to build at least two Stargates, possibly three to keep a decent production schedule up.

The Carrier is THE air weapon in Starcraft. Not only do two Carriers launching a swarm of Interceptors do a ton of damage, but the very sight of the carnage tends to put your opponent in the "Oh crap I'm screwed" way of thinking. Just make sure your upgrade the Interceptor capacity of your Carriers for maximum efficiency.



The scouts cleared the way. Enter the Protoss Carriers and "Operation: Turkey Shoot"



TERRAN

"If a battle don't have lotsa dead aliens, Moonshine and a willing billygoat at the end, it ain't worth fighting." - Joey Ray Jnr, Terran battle commander.

Below is a breakdown of a prime early-mid-end game strategy. The plan is very offensive, and has gained success most of the time. It's by no means the be all and end all of playing the Terrans.

Starcraft is a game of rock, paper and scissors. Every unit has its counterbalance and no strategy is a sure thing. Use the guide as a template, replacing Battlecruisers with Ghosts for example if your attacks lose momentum and your enemy cries out for a nuke or two.

EARLY GAME

Key Unit(s): The Marine is cost effective with strong firepower and the ability to take down both land and air enemies. Comsat Station upgrade for compulsory radar coverage.

Your first priority is to assemble a force of at least five marines, to stop any early attacks. Marines pack a punch in combat, but get taken down pretty quickly in battles. While you can upgrade their armour and weapon strength through the Engineering Bay, the first upgrade should be the U-238 shell booster through the Academy, giving the Marines' guns further range. After this go for one level of increased weapon strength.



Bunkers are the best defensive installation in the game. Best combo is to pack them with three Marines, and one Firebat. If your starting base is located within chokepoints, Bunkers well placed will seal your base effectively from any early attack.

MID GAME

Key Unit: Arclite Siege Tank

Important Note: If your game is going to stretch into a long battle, initiate a second base (and a 3rd or 4th if on a large map) for extra cash.

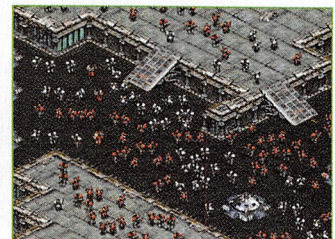
While the Marines are the cost effective stalwart of your military, the building of an Armoury is the beefup you need for mili-

tary success in the midgame. The supreme weapon on offer from the Armoury is the Arclite Siege Tank. Initially an average performer, upgrade these bad boys with the siege ability, and say hello to one of the most impressive units in Starcraft. The siege powerup lets loose a strong area blast and is fantastic for attacking enemy installations. Just park 'em outside enemy encampments, put a few Marines in front for close range cover and open fire. Equally useful for base defense, just park two behind bunkers for that special welcome.

The mid game is typified by Marine and Siege Tank attacks, if you sniff a weak opponent at



Early days for a Terran base and things are looking good. Just remember to spread out recently produced marines, to hinder any quick attacks on your SCV miners.



Pity you can only select 12 units at a time. Where is that damned Wally?



Siege Tanks can inflict friendly fire, don't let your troops go wandering into their bombardment range. Artillery be a beautiful thing.

this stage skip going for aerial/nukes/heavy science upgrades - go in for the Tank/Marine kill. The key here is recon, if your opponent has air power and is well resourced you must prepare for the long game.

END GAME

Key Unit(s): Battlecruiser & Science Vessel.

Ahh the sweetness of the Terran Battlecruiser. Direct resources towards having two Battlecruisers and a fleet of four wraiths, any enemy base will feel the heat.

A note on Battlecruisers; it's very important to keep an SCV near the frontline for repairing these behemoths of the air, as they are expensive to replace but cheap to repair.

At this stage of the game, your enemy will most likely have some sort of cloakable/hidden unit ability which really makes a Science Vessel (or the Mr Burns' ship as it's affectionately known) necessary to spot for your front line troops. This wonder of technology also can be fitted out with the Defensive Matrix, purpose built for a temporary 250 hit point boost to the Battlecruiser's armour.



ZERG

"Burp, ooze, fart, slurp." -Zerg Overmind. Translation being that we kill everything that is better looking than we are.



Zerg units are cheap, and consequently as Zerg commander you should aim to build a sizable army quite quickly. The downside to this affordability is that early units are individually weak.

Be very cautious about base defense with the Zerg. The Underground Colony and its spike attack is a poor defender against enemy ground troops, so it's important to keep the tide of battle away from your homeland.

The Queen and Defiler have excellent "Spell" type special effects and become important in end game troop support. The Defiler's highlight is plague,

which on a large scale weakens enemy units.

An often overlooked advantage of the Zerg is the ease of populating multiple bases with the use of the Nydus Canal. Just push the troops through one side, and they appear at the exit point. Lovely stuff.

EARLY GAME

Key Unit(s): Zergling

The first aim is to build, in this order; a Hatchery, a Spawning Pool and then another Hatchery. This ensures you can pump out the needed number of Drones, plus a ton of Zerglings at maximum rate.

Prepare for Hydralisk produc-

tion with a thought to the construction of a Hydralisk Den, but keep the main emphasis on the upgrading and production of Zerglings.

Research the Bury powerup and place Zerglings around the map as hidden scouts, while attacking opponent on regular intervals. If you can keep your opponent fearful of a Zergling rush, he will probably shift to a defensive state, giving you the edge.

MID GAME

Key Unit(s): Hydralisk, Mutalisk

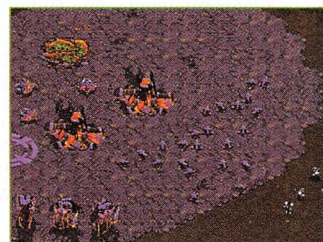
The Hydralisks need to have their attack strength upgraded by one (Evolution Chamber construction required) to be effective in the role as ground assaulter and air defender.

In attack formations, group two attack groups of twelve Zerglings and one attack group of Hydralisks. Using CTRL 1, 2 and 3 respectively these three squads can be kept on the move together. Keep the Hydralisks behind the Zerglings as they have a ranged attack. This troop pattern is much better than just "clumping" a ragtag of Zerglings and Hydralisks together.

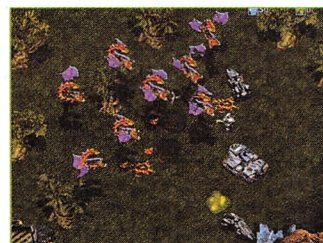
Mutalisks are just wonderful. Cheap flying units at only 100 crystals and 100 Vespene Gas, you



Time for a flashback to the movie Starship Troopers. The Zerg demonstrate that sheer weight of numbers can win battles.



This Zerg base is well protected from any early game attack, thanks to two Hatcheries. Bye bye Marines.



Affordability allows the Zerg player to trump Terran/Protoss players into the air most times. Use this early air advantage for effective strikes.

should aim to have a hoard of these flying beasts sooner rather than later. It costs both the Terrans and the Protoss a lot more cash to assemble an airforce, so as the Zerg player use your early air advantage to the most. Send in waves of Mutalisks, while upgrading their attack through the construction of a Spire.

END GAME

Key Unit(s): Scourge, Ultralisk

The Scourge is a cheap unit but does a lot of damage to expensive enemy air units with its Kamikaze attack. You can almost hear Protoss players' scream when a Scourge takes out one of their bust-the-bank Carriers. Keep at least four Scourge stationed at your base, for quick deployment.

The Ultralisk is an expensive but powerful land unit. Upgrade its strength and it will rip through enemy ground units like cardboard. The services of the Queen, are very valued at this point. Especially for her Broodling ability which infects and destroys enemy units. Never send her out on her lonesome, but she can greatly weaken an enemy attack force while it engages your army.

TIPS & TACTICS

Instant skill for when you need it most

LAST BRONX

★ As with a lot of other fighting games, playing solo in two-player mode gives you a stationary opponent that you can practice your combo moves and special throws on without fear of reprisal.

★ Turn up all graphic options to the max and the game speed will shift to super slow motion (even on a fast Pentium). This can be quite useful for players who find themselves overwhelmed by the machine-gun pace of normal combat. You can fine tune this to arrive at a speed that best suits your fighting style.

★ Learn to block constantly. Your opponents are wielding powerful weapons that can deplete huge chunks of your strength with one blow. Just like real fighting, don't let your guard down until you see a clear opening. Just remember that the blocking command won't protect you from throws and leg sweeps; so maintain a little distance from your opponent.

JEDI KNIGHT: MYSTERIES OF THE SITH

★ Keep an eye on the 2D map to find secret areas and hidden passages.

★ Many levels require passage through easy-to-miss grates that must be cut open with the lightsaber.

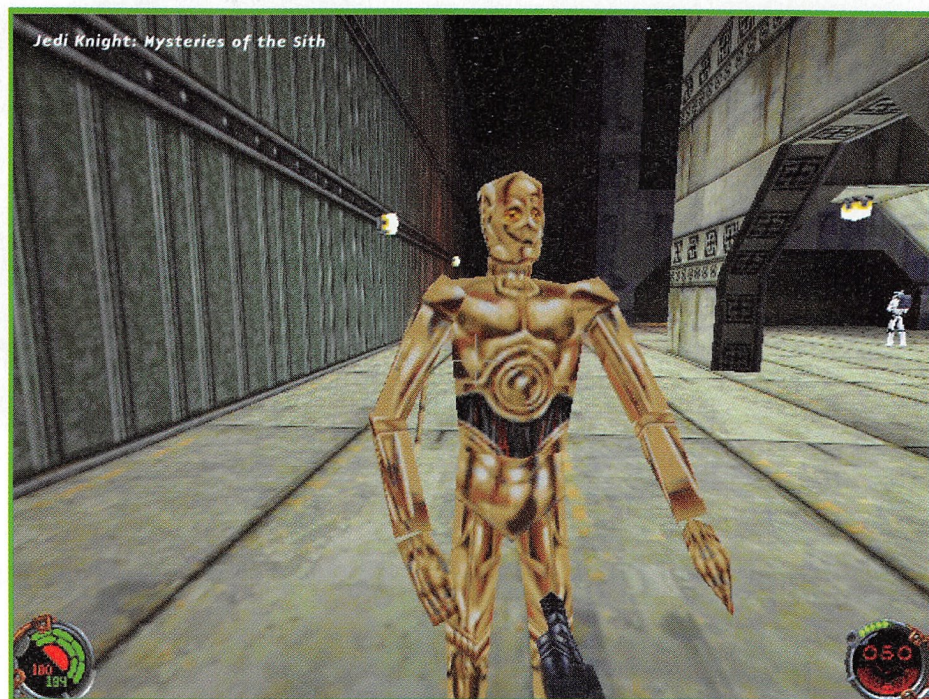
★ Save your Force Stars for later levels when you'll really need them; maximize your advanced offensive Force Powers like the Lightsaber Throw and Destruction.

STARCRAFT

★ Terrans should never forget the lowly trooper. Build them early and often, and buy all the improvements for them you can. These unsung gunners should be the backbone of your defense as they are deadly



106 PC PowerPlay



in a dispersed group to both ground and air units. Two bunkers full of them can hold off a horde of Zerg rushes until help arrives.

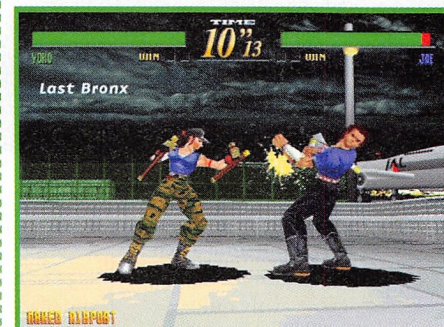
★ The Zerg are designed to be a ravenous horde and should always act as such. Early in any game, put together a double growth pack of Zerglings and send them off to try and cripple any enemy base. Later concentrate your efforts on building air units. A large mass of Mutalisks can puncture any defense if used properly and certainly can maintain air superiority.

★ Protoss players need to be aware of their vulnerabilities, which are time and resources. The Protoss have a huge number of buildings to make and defend in order to be all that they can be. Use your subtle but very important advantage of not needing workers to actually build things to start building structures, and then go back to harvesting. Establish a second resource base as quickly as possible in any game. You will need the crystals and gas badly.

TOTAL ANNIHILATION

★ Layered defenses built in depth are far more effective than scattered strong points or a widely spread, thinly held line.

★ Assigning a construction unit to guard your commander will help it repair damage more quickly. By ordering construction Kbots or vehicles to patrol a safe area, you can create sites where damaged units can be directed for repairs.



★ On maps with numerous metal deposits, don't waste your resources by building metal makers. They place an enormous strain on your energy supply. On maps where metal is scarce, metal makers are a necessity.

★ Take advantage of terrain by seizing the high ground and placing artillery units behind hills so they can shell enemy units on the opposite side.



AGE OF EMPIRES

★ Unless wood is a serious problem, consider building more than one dock, storage pit, and even more than one city centre. Sometimes a surplus of resources needs to be turned into a military advantage fast; multiple storage pits can double your rate of research.

★ Before you start building a Wonder, make sure you've reached your population limit. Set up your defenses and set the vast majority of workers to building the Wonder. Then, prepare for a rush.

ZORK NEMESIS

★ The biggest problem with the game is finding the four various elements in the Temple of Agrippa. The following should help with your lack of sleeping problems:



★ **Fire:** The fire element is located at the end of a secret passage that begins in the Temple library.

★ **Water:** The water element is concealed at the end of the passage that adjoins the altar room. There is a flight of stairs to your left as you circle the altar.

★ **Air:** The air element is hidden in the tower adjoining the main altar room. Look for the entrance in the right corner of the room behind the Dome of the Celestial Spheres.

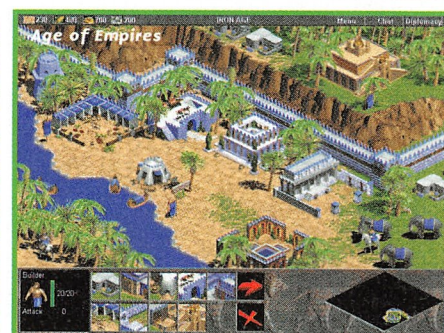
★ **Earth:** The earth element is hidden in a secret cavern below the Temple. The entrance to the underground is in the gallery adjoining the altar room. Look in the upper left corner behind the altar.

SOLE SURVIVOR

★ Don't go on the offensive until you've powered up and spotted much of the map.

★ If you see crates disappearing around you, there's a cloaked enemy nearby.

★ Make a mental note of the location of green healing crates; retreat back to them when you're damaged.



SEVEN KINGDOMS

★ Combat-thirsty players should choose the Normans, Vikings, or Chinese, as their Deities cause the most direct damage to enemy troops and structures.

★ Do not attempt to root out a Fryhtan lair without a fair number of siege engines backing up your troops. Surround the lair with engines and then send in a crack squad of troops to roust the Fryhtans.

★ Hire as many Mercs as early on as possible (without dropping below 1,000 gold), as they not only will make your structures more effective, they will also boost your population during the crucial early phase of the game.

ORACLE

Get past the hard bit

So you're stuck?

Judging from some of your letters you all could use a helping hand, but for some there are a few simple rules you should follow. I know they may be a little excessive and dare I say a little obvious, but regardless - they are needed to get you through just about any game.

Read the manual

You'd be surprised how many people don't know that they can pick things up, combine inventory items and save their game! And guess where all this information is? You guessed it!

Click on everything!

"Everything?" Yes! everything! Even though you think that teapot is just for decoration - it might be the most important clue of the game. And you'll never know unless you click on it!

Pick up anything that isn't nailed down

While some games let you carry anything - including the kitchen sink - others only let you pick up 'x' number of items, so again, read the manual. Once you do pick up an object, examine it. What harm can it do? Just don't open Pandora's box.

Talk to everyone about everything

Most games give you a conversation list to go by. Ask everyone everything on the list until the characters start repeating themselves. Talking about one topic usually leads to more clues. Also make sure you offer them things from your inventory. Most of the time they don't want it (unless it's theirs!) but many times they know something about it.

Save your game!

Even I get on a roll and forget to save my game sometimes - but it's one of the more important rules to follow. We hate to see you commit hari kari because you died and haven't saved your game after 12 hours.

Write to Oracle at:

ORACLE
PC POWERPLAY
78 RENWICK ST.
REDFERN
NSW 2016
SETUP@PCPOWERPLAY.NEXT.COM.AU

Ok enough with the rules, let's see what problems we have this month...

BETRAYAL OF ANTARA



I'm stuck on the second chapter in Betrayal Of Antara. I know I have to take Aren to see the High Wizard. Trouble is, how do I make him talk?

June Miles
Pacific Pines QLD



He won't talk until you find him some Chilen Tea. But it's not that simple. To find some tea you need to speak to the exotic foods merchant in Midova. When you find him, however, you will notice he is out of tea, and need to wait a week for it. So after you speak to him burn a week of game time then go back to Midova. Oh yeah, and read the manual...

BLACK DAHLIA



Help! I have got Ernie's picture and showed it to the detective. I have gone to the Raven room and they keep telling me that they are closed and to come back later. I have given everything to Helen and solved the stain glass puzzle. Every time I go back to her I get the same two questions I can ask her. Can I see the book again? Can I look at the stained glass again? I have done everything I can and I still can't talk to Louie and I can't get Helen to respond to me or give me anything.

B. Mellock
Mt Nathan QLD



Hmm... have you remembered to save your game? Ok let's see... after you've solved the stained glass puzzle, did you turn on the light above the work table to reveal the names from the puzzle? After doing that you need to go to McGinty's Bar and make a phone call. You will also need to enter the correct name, which you should now have.

BLACK DAHLIA



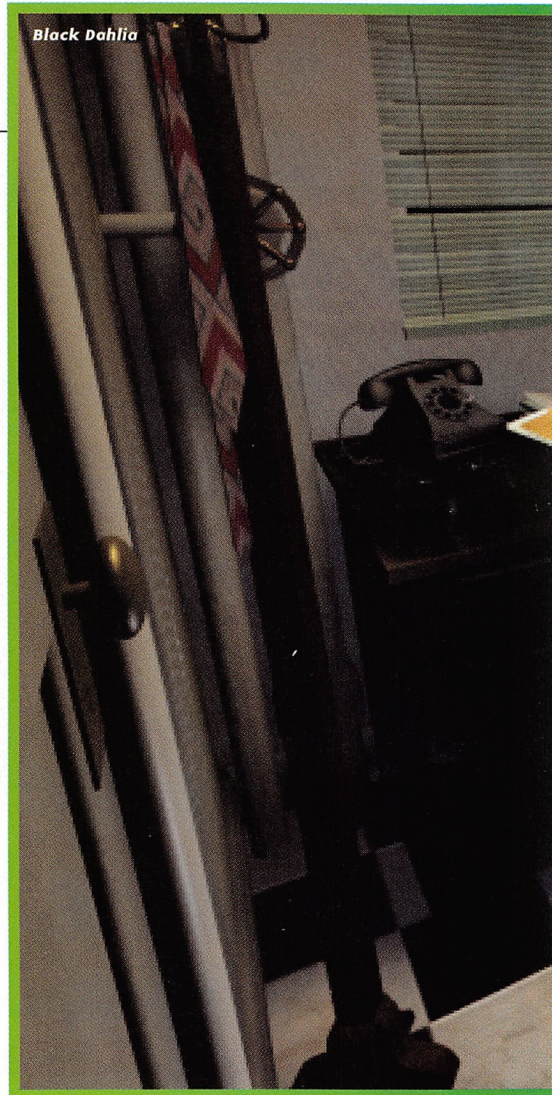
I have been in Winslow's office while he's "busy entertaining" and I cannot find the safe. Where is it? I have looked everywhere. Can you give me a quick hint.

Paul Dempsey
Woodhill QLD



Quick hint? OK check all the pictures and try sliding the pictures instead of pushing.

Black Dahlia



CURSE OF MONKEY ISLAND



I need help with the Curse Of Monkey Island. I am in part 3 where the pirates sing and sing and sing. How do I make them stop? I don't know what to do - please help me!

Jane Pickering
Carrieton SA



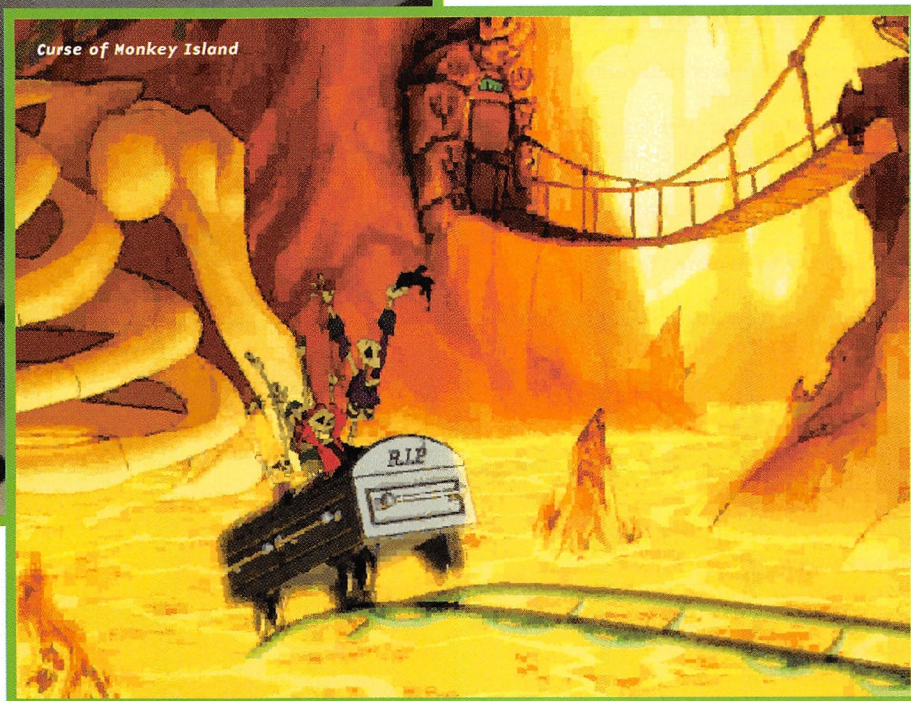
How do you make them stop... Please make them stop... Oh the number of letters we get on this one. It's not that hard if you think logically. Try selecting a verse that ends with orange. They can't rhyme anything with orange so they stop singing.



drop the gun. Everyone boards the ship. Regan and Cross get trapped in the Power Cell Room. Cross shoots Tex in the leg. Tex can't get off the ship in time.

5 - When Cross asks you to shoot Fitz - you shoot Cross. Uh - the gun was empty and Cross kills you. Bye Bye.

6 - When Cross asks you to shoot Fitz - you do. The gun was empty. Everyone boards the ship. Fitz traps Cross, Regan, and Tex in the Power Cell room. Tex's helps them escape but not in time. Fitz killed you all. Now you all rest in pieces.



DIABLO

? I am stuck in Diablo, I do not know how to kill Dark Lord - do you have any hints or tips. My magic level is only 45 and I am a Warrior.

Jim Internet

***** Yeah, some warrior... The good news is that you don't need magic to kill him, just heaps of full healing potions, a Griswald's blade or any Sword of the Bear to keep him away from you. Try a reflect spell if you must use magic so when he does hit you he will hurt himself. Failing that, try playing Tetris instead.

PANDORA DIRECTIVE

? I finally finished Pandora Directive but have been told there's more than one ending to the game. It took me long enough to see one ending, but I don't want to go through all the others. Can you tell me what they were? At least now I can now rest in peace.

**Con Panos
Canterbury NSW**

***** Great to see you made it to 1998, we thought we lost you for a while with that game. But don't think you got off easily, there's still another sequel Tex Murphy: Overseer to beat. Anyway, here is what you probably missed.

1 - Everyone boards the ship. Regan and Cross get trapped in the Power Cell Room. Cross kills Fitzpatrick. Tex sets the controls and gets off the ship before it takes off. You have dinner at Chelsee's and get a special treat for dessert.

2 - Everyone boards the ship. Regan and Cross get trapped in the Power Cell Room. Cross kills Fitzpatrick. Tex sets the controls and gets off the ship before it takes off. You don't make it with Chelsee - you get yourself a Holodate instead. Just like your real life.

3 - Everyone boards the ship. Regan and Cross get trapped in the Power Cell Room. Cross shoots Tex in the leg. Fitzpatrick lets Tex get off the ship then sets the controls himself. Tex lives.

4 - When Cross asks you to shoot Fitz - you

SANITARIUM

? Can you help me with Sanitarium. I've made it out of the cooler and need to try and open the incinerator door. I've found the wrench and disassembled the pipes and found the urn, matches and the bust but can't seem to do anything else. How do you open the incinerator door cause I feel this is probably important.

**John Barnhill
Buckley Vic**

***** You're right, getting the incinerator to work is important. More important than tomorrow's assignment you have due. Go back to the office where you found the bust (actually, there are two busts, both in the same office). You can use the bust on one of the walls to weaken it. Then pick up the second bust and use it on the same wall to finish destroying it. Go through the wall and turn on the gas.

CODE

Legitimate and honourable help for gamers impaired by bloody-minded game designers.

BATTLEZONE

Cheat Codes

Unlimited Shields: Hold down CTRL-SHIFT and type BZBODY

Unlimited Pilots and Recousen: Hold down CTRL-SHIFT and type BZFREE

Full Map: Hold down CTRL-SHIFT and type BZRADAR

Unlimited Ammo: Hold down CTRL-SHIFT and type BZTNT

BETRAYAL IN ANTARA

Cheat Codes

During the game press shift-control-z and any of the following:

Gotta have magic: Aren learns all the spells

Why am I so dull: All character traits are maxed

Some call me Tim: Destroys all the enemies on a battle screen

Ask a Glass of Water: Teleport Party to Beginning of Chapter

Man Does My Leg Hurt: Heal the Party

Supermarket for the Rich: Access cache of good items

BLACK DAHLIA

Cheat Codes

Type in the following cheat codes to get past some of the puzzles:

Cheat Code	Puzzle Name
#1KEYPUNCH	Key/Treasure Door
#2GEAROIL	Half-A-Gear/Treasure Door
#3TEMPLE	Main Chamber Column
ARTHUR	Raven Room Table
BLOCKHEAD	Slider
BONGO	Cuckoo Clock
BOXTOP	Luggage Crate on Train
CANCAND	ream/Archway
CANDYCANE	Cane Lock
GEMSTONE	Bag of Runes
LADYBUG	Gearshift/Treasure Door
LEADHEAD	Stained Glass
LOGHOUSE	Wooden House/Lockbox
MASTERLOCK	Winslow's Safe
NIMBLE	Raven Room Candlestick
PEEPER	Telescope
PRESSURE	Sewer Levers/Bars
RINGDING	Seal
ROCK33	Stone Blocks
SUNSPOT	Sun/Planets/Door
TELEPORT	Telegram
TRIANGLE	Raven Room Door Plates
TURNKEY	Dresser in Louie's Loft

CLAW

Cheat Codes

MPFPS: Display frame rate

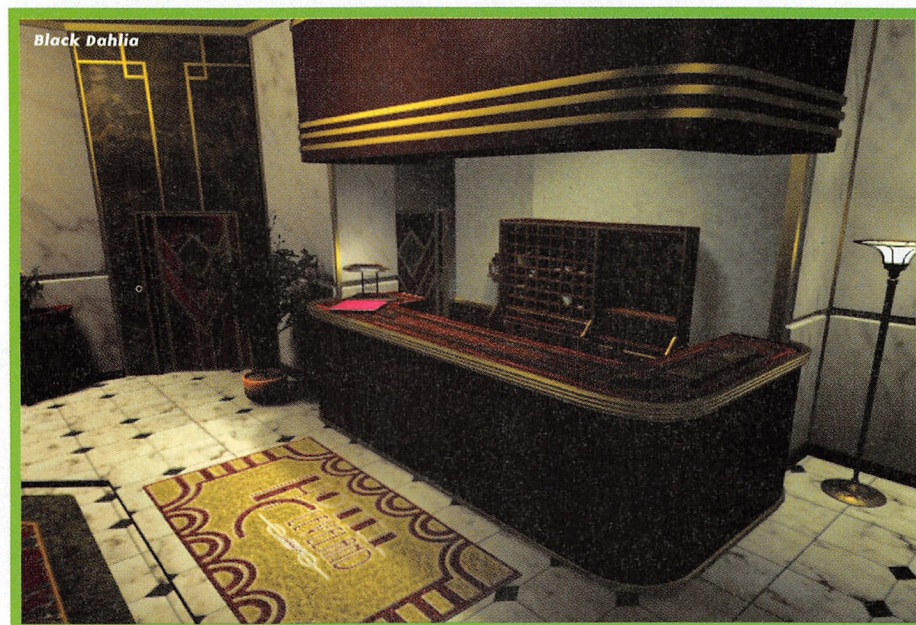
MPHAUNTED: Ghost bad guys

MPKFA: Invincibility

MPPOS: Display world position

MPPSTOPWATCH: Display elapsed time

MPWIMPY: Wimpy mode



INTERSTATE 76: NITRO

Secret Vehicles

Make variants of the Phaedra Rattler with these names:

HOTAIR: Hot-Air Balloon

THETRUTHISHERE: UFO

STARCRRAFT

Cheat Codes

These are only good in single-player mode. Activate the cheats by pressing Enter to enable the Chat mode, then type in the following codes:

SHOW ME THE MONEY 10,000 gas and minerals

OPERATION CWAL speeds construction of buildings and units

THE GATHERING unlimited mana to all spell-casting units

GAME OVER MAN you're a loser

NO GLUES forbids enemies from using magic

POWER OVERWHELMING god mode

STAYING ALIVE unable to complete current mission

THERE IS NO COW LEVEL completes current

mission

WHATS MINE IS MINE free minerals

BREATHE DEEP free vespene gas

SOMETHING FOR NOTHING all available upgrades

BLACK SHEEP WALL reveals entire map

MEDIEVAL MAN upgrades units

FOOD FOR THOUGHT build units beyond supply limit

VR POWERBOAT RACING

Cheat Codes

EPS: Championship mode

PBR: Slalom mode

PDL: Access Mines Secret level

URN: Catamarans

YODA STORIES

Cheat Codes

While playing, pause the game and type:

Force: get force

Object: get objects needed for that world

Junk: get lots of junk

Sabre: get powerful lightsaber

Blasters: all guns



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BENCHTEST

Voodoo 2 & Fully-featured Multimedia

We test another 3D games solution, and also a TV/Video card for your viewing pleasure

Voodoo2 Orchid Righteous 3D II

One thing is becoming clear with the Voodoo 2, there's very little difference between each different manufacturer's card. Although in this circumstance the Orchid appears to be trailing the other cards, we've tested in terms of its Powerbench. Being 1 mark behind the Creative just isn't substantial enough to warrant any kind of remark.

Realistically, what does set the cards apart is price and bundled software. The Orchid bundle consisting of Battlezone, Jedi Knight, Incoming and G-Police is an excellent one. Especially considering that Incoming is a game designed for second generation cards (such as the Voodoo 2) and runs poorly on the Voodoo 1.

One of the things that stands out about Orchid is their excellent support. With their admirable history from the original Righteous in terms of driver support and Direct X certification, they're a powerful gaming ally to have. Add to that the excellent choice of bundled software and you have a worthy purchase.

Multi-Media Samsung DooIn Media Camp

Samsung are obviously more renowned for their low price TV's and household appliances than they are for PC parts, but in reality they've actually been manufacturing computer components for quite a while. Although mainly in the area of RAM modules, Samsung are

now venturing out into the world of video cards.

The Media Camp Victory (MCV) is their premier product in the very crowded world of video cards.

Samsung, in this instance, are only acting as distributors to Korean company DooIn electronics. This is actually a good thing. It's obvious the Samsung R&D guys have looked hard and long for an all encompassing video card that hits the mark in both performance, functionality and price.

The MCV as a video card is a rather awesome beast to behold. It hasn't got the fastest 2D and its 3D being S3 based isn't even worth commenting on. Instead it's the other facets of the card that make it something special. It incorporates an absolute plethora of other features.

For starters, the MCV has a TV tuner built in. Unlike the V2200 and the Canopus Total

on the card is compatible with screw-in cable TV co-ax connections. Not only is there no need for a co-ax converter, but the software even has a Cable TV mode allowing for multiple frequencies and channels.

Video/TV capabilities are also extremely good. Video-in is analog based, so not quite the same quality as the V2200, but in favour of the MCV and making it better than the Canopus Total 3D

It hasn't got the fastest 2D and its 3D being S3 based isn't even worth commenting on. Instead it's the other facets of the card that make it something special. It incorporates an absolute plethora of other features.

3D, these aren't just video-in capabilities - the TV tuner is built into the card. Plug an aerial into the appropriate slot and you're ready to channel surf. Even better, the actual connector

is that there is no resolution limit on video. The MCV displays an analog signal quite happily from 640 x 480 to 1280 x 1024. The video capture driver is also fully Windows 95 compatible.

BENCHTEST: ORCHID RIGHTEOUS 3D II

Chipset: 3Dfx Voodoo 2
Memory: 12Mb
Powerbench 3Dfx: 122.121
RRP \$645

Voodoo 2 Powerbench History at a glance

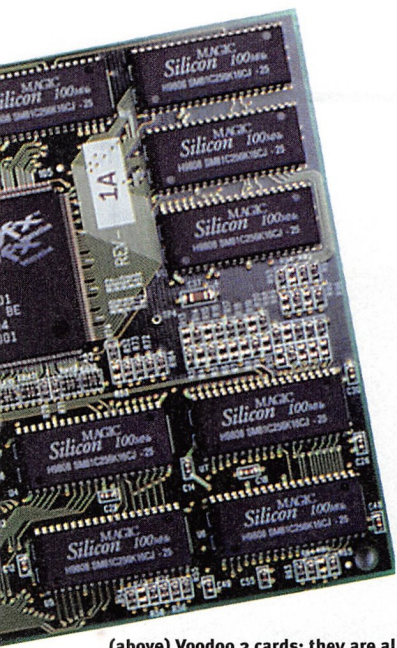
Creative Powerbench 3D (12Mb): 123.723
Creative Powerbench 3D (12Mb on a Pentium 2): 130.264
Diamond Powerbench 3D (8Mb): 124.848

BENCHTEST: SAMSUNG DOOIN MEDIA CAMP VICTORY

Chipset: ViRGE/GX2
Memory: 4Mb SGRAM
Additional features: TV Tuner, TV Output, Dual View display, Video-in, Remote Control.

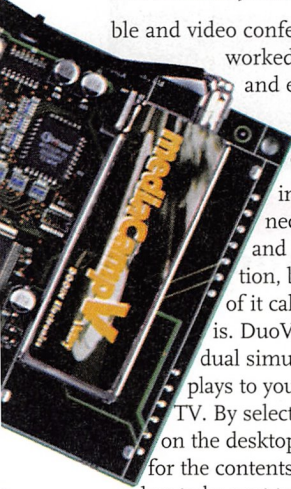
Powerbench 2D: 47.5161
Powerbench 3D: 25.2594
Powerbench Overall: 36.3877
Price: \$395
Ease of Installation: Good. No problems.

3DTech News



(above) Voodoo 2 cards: they are all much of a muchness, it's mostly the price and software included that makes the difference

(below) The addition of the remote for the Dooin Camp card eliminates the need for desktop windows



ble and video conferencing worked effortlessly and easily.

Next on the feature list is TV-out. This in itself isn't necessarily a new and exciting function, but a process of it called DuoView is. DuoView allows for dual simultaneous displays to your CRT and TV. By selecting a window on the desktop, it is possible for the contents of the window to be sent to the TV.

Besides obvious uses for presentations it's a pretty neat feature that no other video card has incorporated.

Other functions include an MPEG-2 interface allowing for direct input from a DVD decoder card and in built MPEG 1 playback. Also, and perhaps gimmicky, but one of the most interesting and rather cool additions to the MCV is a remote control.

A small sensor receiver plugs into the back of the card allowing use of the remote control to change the in-built tuners channel, input source, and volume. It works well and is a lot more convenient than having multiple windows on your desktop, especially if the video input source is at full screen.

From a functionality point of view, this card is absolutely fantastic. However, it is sadly let down by a few little problems with its image delivery. Firstly its colour output is rather washed out and adjusting contrast on the monitor only results in pixel flaring.

Secondly and a little sadly is

AMD - 3D

One of the more interesting developments on the horizon of 3D processing is coming from alternative chip manufacturer AMD. They've just renamed the K6 3D chip the "K6-2 with 3DNow enhancement technology". "3DNow!" technology from AMD is a set of 21 new instructions within the x86 processor architecture that enables new levels of 3D performance.

The chip is tuned to run graphical applications such as games. It features better floating point performance than standard K6 chips, (an important feature for pixel manipulation), and is compatible with motherboards featuring a 100-MHz system bus. Ultimately, 3D Now boosts all new floating point performance with a series of 21 new instructions that haven't yet been disclosed.

INTEL VS 3D ACCELERATOR MANUFACTURERS

Since our own discovery here at PCPP that 3D accelerators are becoming more processor dependent, or more accurately,

that 3D accelerators are becoming much more powerful than system CPU's - the battle has begun.

The conflict between Intel and the graphics-accelerator companies are being fought over how the 3D graphics pipeline should be partitioned. At the recent Computer Game Developers Conference, the debate centered on the geometry front end of the 3D pipeline, where transforms and lighting are calculated. Geometry and lighting (a component of primitive triangle calculation) are the exclusive domain of the CPU. But graphics-chip vendors say that the CPU has topped out its ability to churn out more triangles at a rate that can keep up with the latest 3D processors. Something we have already confirmed with 2 SLI'd Voodoo 2's.

Although the Katmai Pentium II processor, which will include about 70 new floating-point "single-instruction - multiple-data instructions", geared for 3D processing is due, it won't come soon enough. Already 3D manufacturers frustrated with Intel's

slow pace are developing new graphics accelerators that include geometry and lighting hardware on-board.

THE GOLDEN WHAT?



3Dfx are a cool company! How cool? So cool they even have their own awards that they give out. Called the Golden Anubis awards, 3Dfx bestow acclaim to developers and publishers, giving recognition to significant achievements in game design. Of course they are all 3Dfx titles only, but interesting none the less.



Quake 2: Best advanced use of Technology & Best use of OpenGL

3Dfx Golden Anubis Awards

The categories, contenders and winners:

Best use of special effects:

- Incoming by Rage
- Wing Commander Prophecy by Origin
- Battlezone by Activision
- Extreme Assault by Blue Byte
- Shadow Master by Psygnosis
- Sub Culture by Criterion
- F-15 by Jane's Combat Simulations

Winner: Incoming

Best Advanced Use of Technology:

- Quake 2 by Id
- MS Flight Simulator '98 by Microsoft
- Ultimate Race Pro by Kallisto
- Monster Truck Madness 2 by

Terminal Reality

- Hexen II by Raven
- F1 Racing Simulation by UbiSoft

Winner: Quake 2

Best Use of Scalability:

- Tomb Raider 2 by Core
- Ultimate Race Pro by Kallisto
- Forsaken by Acclaim
- G-Police by Psygnosis
- Turok by Acclaim
- Jedi Knight by LucasArts

Winner: Tomb Raider 2

Best Use of 3Dfx Arcade Technology

- Blitz by Midway
- SF Rush: Rock Edition by Atari Games
- California Speed by Atari Games
- Hang Pilot by Konami
- Armageddon by Acclaim

Winner: Blitz

Best Use of D3D with 3Dfx Technology

- Incoming by Rage
- CART: Precision Racing by Terminal Reality
- Forsaken by Acclaim
- Jedi Knight by LucasArts
- Tomb Raider 2 by Core
- G-Police by Psygnosis

Winner: Forsaken

Best Use of OpenGL:

- Quake 2 by Id
- Hexen II by Raven
- Streets of Sim City by Maxis

Winner: Quake 2

Best Use of Glide:

- Need for Speed II SE by EA
- NHL Hockey '98 by EA
- Die by the Sword by Treyarch
- Wing Commander Prophecy by Origin
- Uprising by Cyclone
- Spec Ops by Zombie

Winner: Need for Speed II SE

that when running either the TV tuner or video input there is a slight distortion over the whole screen. It's not immediately apparent, but a slight waver will occur over your desk-

top. From a distance this imperfection can't be seen, but if you're sitting at your desk using your PC it's noticeable enough to become distracting.

Ultimately, at \$395 the Media

Camp is an incredibly good buy for a primary video card with this many features. Let down by only slight image imperfections when displaying video-in, it's an otherwise excellent card.

Quick Bytes

FIGHTER SQUADRON

Those into prop-based flight simulation should get excited now. Fighter Squadron is currently in beta and looking fantastic. The prop spin, complete with strobe effect and the attention to detail in damage modelling is astounding. Crash lightly and bend your prop or your gear, crash hard and watch a prop break or pieces of your airframe go flying. Wheels break off and go rolling or bouncing away and flames and smoke erupt as you score hits on your adversary. You can then watch the flames spread rearward as they are fanned in the wind.

I-WAR 3DFX PATCH

Fans of the incredible I-War will be tickled multiple colours to know that the 3Dfx patch has entered beta stages. Despite the patch not even being optimised, reports are in that the visual enhancements are enough to keep anyone from going back to the original, or is simply just cause to play through the game again.

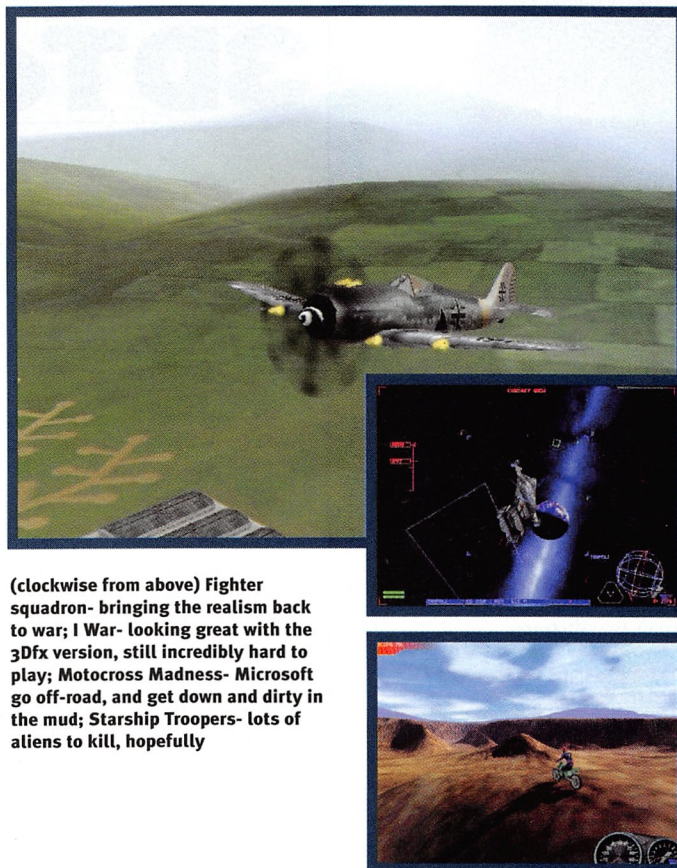
R.I.F.T.

R.I.F.T. is a real-time 3D action game set in the far future. You fly a Powersuit in a team of elite troops sent to take on tasks to tough for everyone else (ain't it always the way). Your jobs include planting bombs in a capital ship or even accessing the onboard computer to get some sensitive data. The game is set in a 3rd person view so you have unprecedented situational awareness and control of your on-screen alter-ego.

MOTORCROSS MADNESS

Motorcross Madness is an upcoming release from the world of Microsoft and with the amount of bike sims out at the moment it would have to be something special to garnish some attention. Well, graphically MM is something special, it features native 3D acceleration, motion captured rider animation, indoor and outdoor environments, and as you can see from the screenshot, looks incredible.

Jere Lawrence



(clockwise from above) Fighter squadron- bringing the realism back to war; I War- looking great with the 3Dfx version, still incredibly hard to play; Motocross Madness- Microsoft go off-road, and get down and dirty in the mud; Starship Troopers- lots of aliens to kill, hopefully

READERS LETTER:

DO I REALLY NEED VOODOO 2?

Q In your latest issue (24) you benchmarked the Voodoo2 and stated that it was only 12% faster than a Voodoo 1 on a 200 MMX. Having recently upgraded my computer to a 200MMX and unable to afford to upgrade again, is it worth forking out the extra money for a Voodoo 2 or should I just buy the first Voodoo? Your advice is much appreciated.

Sonia

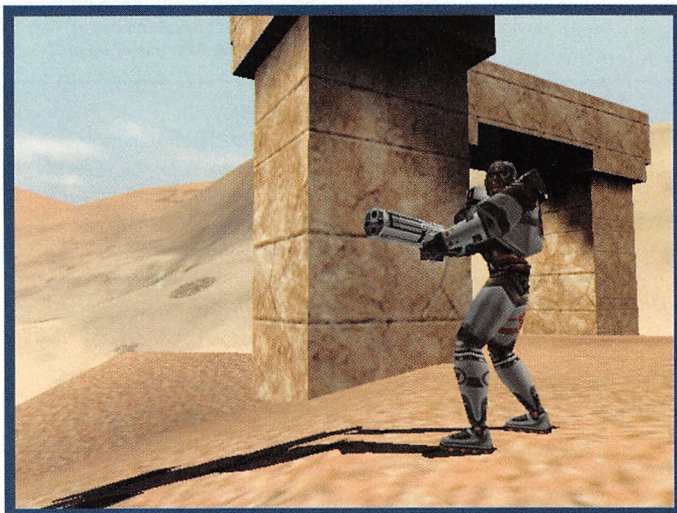
A Greetings Sonia. Your question, an extremely pertinent one at that is one we've received from quite a number of people. The first thing that should be noted is that the 12% increase I talk about is in relation to polygonal rendering. That is to say, how many polygons a second the Voodoo 2 can render. Considering that the Voodoo 1 was always the premier 3D accelerator card, even a 12% increase is quite an achievement.

That said, in the areas of fill rate and texturing the Voodoo 2 is more than twice as fast as a Voodoo 1. Add to that the extra texture memory of the Voodoo 2 and games

utilising a myriad of large textures (the next generation of 3D games) will only be accessible on a Voodoo 2 and not a Voodoo 1.

Not forgetting the increased Z-buffer memory of the Voodoo 2, which allows you to run games at a resolution of 800 x 600. I never used to be a big proponent of cards that could run at a higher resolution until I played Nightmare Creatures on 2 SLI'd Voodoo's at 1024 x 768. The difference - particularly in the quality of the textures was astounding. As more Voodoo 2 accelerators are purchased, developers will start to design around an 800 x 600 platform and running at 640 x 480 won't be as desirable.

Ultimately, I would suggest getting a Voodoo 2 over a Voodoo 1. There are a lot more performance increases than just the 12% polygonal; much improved image quality and the next generation of games that are coming that will support its advanced features. More importantly, the Voodoo 2 will definitely keep you going until you can afford that Pentium 2 upgrade.



LifeView. Seeing is believing

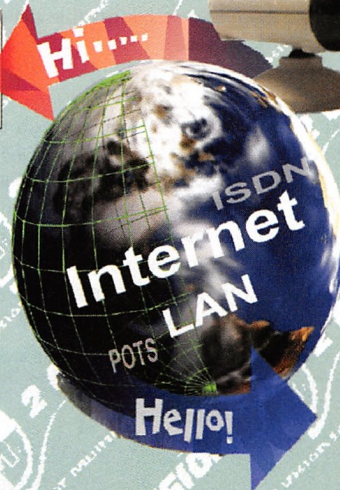
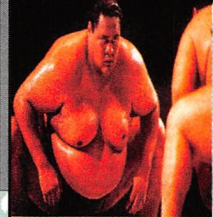
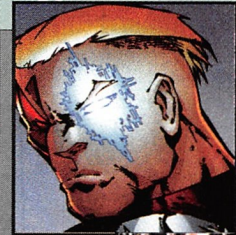
Fly Video II TV Tuner

Fly Video is a low cost high performance TV tuner, video capture and video conference adapter. It features high resolution display windows, scalable or full-screen, up to 1600 x 1200 and captures 768 x 576.

*In 1600 x 1200 at Hi Color or above mode, Fly Video can simultaneously display 100 windows of the same video source. ►

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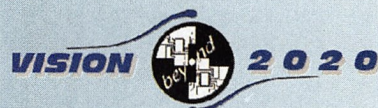


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WHEN YOU WRITE, REMEMBER TO INCLUDE AS MUCH PERTINENT INFORMATION AS POSSIBLE. SEND YOUR CONFIG.SYS AND AUTOEXEC.BAT AND ANY ASSOCIATED *.INI FILES FOR WINDOWS THAT MIGHT TELL ME MORE ABOUT YOUR PROBLEM. GIVE ME AS DETAILED AN EXPLANATION AS YOU CAN AND BE SURE TO INCLUDE AS MUCH DETAIL AS POSSIBLE ABOUT YOUR PC. FEEL FREE TO EMAIL YOUR QUESTIONS OR, IF YOU WANT TO SNAIL MAIL, PLEASE REMEMBER TO WRITE CLEARLY OR BETTER STILL, PRINT YOUR LETTERS. PLEASE NOTE THAT DUE TO THE VOLUME OF MESSAGES WE RECEIVE, WE CANNOT GUARANTEE A RESPONSE TO YOUR QUERIES.

Setup
PC PowerPlay
78 Renwick st.
Redfern
NSW 2016
setup@pcpowerplay.next.com.au

MEMORY MANAGEMENT

Q In past issues of PC PowerPlay you guys talked about locking memory in Win 95 to a fixed size by setting your vcache section of system.ini to the same minfile & maxfile.

Is this setting the same as the memory setting reported in Setup, issue 22, about setting a static limit to Win 95's virtual memory. Any help would be greatly appreciated, as I have just purchased an extra 64Mb of RAM to turn my P200 MMX 64mb, into 128Mb RAM, and want to know how best to handle this extra memory.

Scott Kitchener
Adelaide

A With 128Mb you're not going to find too much that's going to tax your system!

First of all we need to delineate between memory, virtual memory and file cache. Memory is, obviously, your PC's memory and Windows will allocate it all for use on your system. Virtual Memory is simply an aged method for using hard drive space as a supplement for system memory. Programs think you have as much memory as the total of your installed RAM plus virtual memory. Windows will use virtual memory if programs demand more RAM than you have system RAM. Virtual memory is, as you would expect, incredibly slow compared to RAM, no matter how fast your hard drive. Users with low memory systems will know all too well the Windows 'disk-thrash' as virtual memory is accessed.

The file cache is exactly that, a cache allocated from your system memory to buffer disk reads and writes, thereby speeding up system responsiveness.

So, with 128Mb you can rest assured that your virtual memory is unlikely to be called upon and, with so much RAM, you can afford to allocate a large file cache to

improve your performance. Nevertheless you should always allocate some virtual memory 'just in case' and to keep Windows happy.

Now, here's where your confusion arose. Windows' virtual memory is handled by clicking to Control Panel → System → Virtual Memory. Here you can see min and max sizes, as well as the drive to place the swapfile. For your system set both values to 32 and, if possible, choose a second physical drive separate from your boot drive. These tips apply to all users, although those with less RAM might consider raising the swapfile size. Why force the size instead of letting Windows dynamically re-size it? So you can get rid of that 'disk-thrashing' and increase performance since no time is wasted re-sizing the swapfile.

Windows' file cache can't be set from anywhere within Windows. To change this you need to edit SYSTEM.INI in your Windows directory change or add the following lines under the [VCACHE] heading:

MinFileSize=
MaxFileSize=

The VCACHE setting is, as you can see, different from virtual memory. As with virtual memory, forcing the cache size will stop Windows dynamically re-sizing the cache during operation, which can sometimes be inefficient, especially on low memory systems.

For your system I'd let loose and allocate a 16-32M file cache. Users with less memory should allocate anywhere between 4-8M.

PING PONG

Q I have recently been purchasing your mag and find it much more informative than the foreign ones. But I have a small question. With all your talk about online gaming I have attempted a few forays into the field. Every time I play a game I get told by the other players that I have a bad ping. What the hell is that and how do I rectify it?

Paul Jones
Internet

A Ping is the program used to measure the time it takes for a packet to be sent to a host and return. The name, apparently, originated from sonar where a 'ping' is sent out and reflected back by any solid objects within a certain range. Distance to objects can be measured by the time it takes for the reflection to arrive. On the Internet the concept is similar with the ping program reporting the time it takes to reach a host.

Bad ping then is a bad ping result, meaning the time it takes for information to travel from your PC to the host machine you're playing games on is so long that it's too slow to play the game reliably. A ping result of under 400ms is generally OK for games, though for fast responses and the best gameplay you really want a ping under 200ms to a server.

If you have bad ping it could be because your ISP isn't particularly efficient (it depends on where the site you're connecting to is located in the world) and the solution, then, is to sign up with a better ISP.

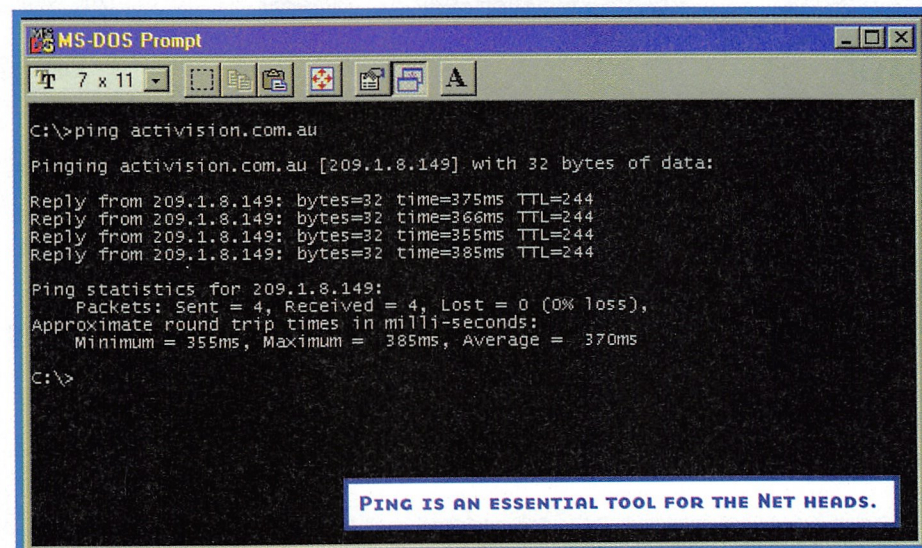
LOCAL TCP/IP

Q Recently I purchased the great Quake 2 only to find that id ditched nearly all of their network gaming options, including IPX networking and left us with only TCP/IP protocol to play on. Now here's my problem - is it at all possible to get a TCP network going on my Win 95 machine or do I have to get some more software?

The hardware I have is just some standard NE2000 compatible net cards.

Toobs
Internet

A Sure is! Just go to Settings → Control Panel → Networking and click Add. Click Protocol → Microsoft → TCP/IP (why this is under 'Microsoft' is anyone's guess). Now you've already likely got TCP/IP for your 'Dial up adapter' (modem) configured. This is where you would have placed the DNS IP address-



```
MS-DOS Prompt
C:\>ping activision.com.au

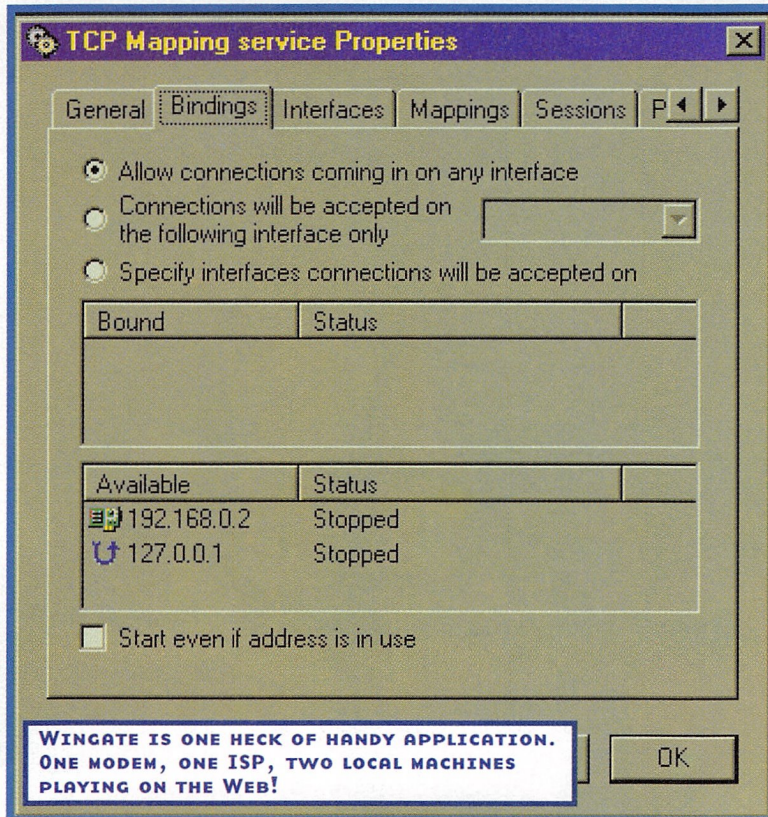
Pinging activision.com.au [209.1.8.149] with 32 bytes of data:

Reply from 209.1.8.149: bytes=32 time=375ms TTL=244
Reply from 209.1.8.149: bytes=32 time=366ms TTL=244
Reply from 209.1.8.149: bytes=32 time=355ms TTL=244
Reply from 209.1.8.149: bytes=32 time=385ms TTL=244

Ping statistics for 209.1.8.149:
    Packets: Sent = 4, Received = 4, Lost = 0 (0% loss),
    Approximate round trip times in milli-seconds:
        Minimum = 355ms, Maximum = 385ms, Average = 370ms

C:\>
```

PING IS AN ESSENTIAL TOOL FOR THE NET HEADS.



es for your ISP. Configuring TCP/IP for a closed network, however, is different.

For a start, each machine needs its own unique IP address (just like the Internet) so click on IP Address and then 'Specify an IP address'. Because it's a closed network you can, generally, use any number you want to. However there is a standard for closed networks, believe it or not, to ensure compatibility, I believe. Set the address for the first machine on the network to 192.168.0.1. Set the second machine to 192.168.0.2 and so on. And that's basically it, there's no need to tweak any other settings. Reboot and you should be able to play any game that supports TCP/IP over your network.

GAMING TO THE NET

Q Back a while ago, in PC PowerPlay, there was an article on setting up a small LAN for gaming at home.

I had already figured this out for myself (for Doom) and have since expanded on the idea. I have Wingate installed, which allows the computers on the LAN to access the net through a modem connected on one PC. We can use all Socks compatible programs, and Kali etc, but we want to use some of the proprietary interfaces eg. Battle.net and Heavy Gear.

I understand that Windows 95 cannot perform as a server, routing the packets from the LAN to the net. Apparently NT is needed for this, but

is this end of story, or could I get a third party program to do this?

I have tried numerous ideas and apps (I.share came closest, but was full of hassles), and any help would be appreciated.

**Unifex
Internet**

A Actually, WinGate can do this. In the configuration (GateKeeper, depending on what version you're running) you'll find references to 'direct pipes' (otherwise known as a 'TCP Mapping') as opposed to HTTP/FTP/POP3 etc. links. All you need to do is setup a direct pipe between the computer on your network and the IP address of the gaming site. In the case of Wingate 2.0 and later, click Tools -> New -> Service -> TCP Mapping. Make sure you use a local port not used by another service (21 is for FTP, 80 for HTTP etc). To find out the IP of the game server you want to map to, just do a ping or a trace to the site and you'll get the IP. You'll also need to find the port the game server uses. For some games, like Quake, this is easily found out just by connecting to the server and seeing what info is displayed. If you can't discover the port in-game, you'll need to email the company that runs the server and ask them what port to connect to.

Generally WinGate can pass through any information to the Internet as long as a pipe is setup to direct it.

Tech Tips

Personalise your PC with quick & easy tweaking tips

COMMAND LINE RUN

As an update to the shortcut to 'Run' on the desktop; now you can have a full command-line on the desktop; allowing you to click on it, type a command, and it will send this command to DOS which will execute it. You will need to create a batch file, say cmd.bat; and place in it:

```
@%1 %2 %3 %4 %5 %6 %7 %8 %9
@pause
@exit
```

Now save it, and right-click on the file (in My Computer or Explorer) and select properties. Click on the Program tab. Go to where it says 'Cmd line: C:\CMD.BAT' and add a '?' to the end; so it will read 'C:\CMD.BAT ?'. Then check the box that says 'Close on exit', hit OK, and you're done! Note: If you want the DOS session to close automatically; without you having to 'Press any key to continue...'; just take out the '@exit' line.

Kaj "Quakeman" Haffenden

FAST DESKTOP

Here's a tip to make your desktop come up faster. I really mean FASTER. Go to the Control Panel. Double click the Display properties. Find the background patterns. Set it to None. Now your desk top will load heaps faster without the slowdown.

Yun

WINKEYS

Just reading your column in the latest PCPP, and I saw the piece "Shortcut to 'Run' on the Desktop" by Kaj Haffenden. Putting another icon on the desktop might be a neat idea, but there's a much better way already built into Windows 95.

Simply hold that little Windows key in between CTRL and ALT and hit "R" and you get the 'Run' dialog box. Then use the up and down arrows to scroll through all the recent commands you've used.

What? You say you don't have a keyboard with the Windows Key on it? C'mon! If you pay more than \$25 for a new Win95 keyboard, you're not even trying! WinKey+R isn't the only built in shortcut either, there's also:
WinKey+E - Open up a Windows Explorer screen
WinKey+F - Open up the Find File dialog box
WinKey+M - Minimize all open Windows (hold shift to maximise them)
WinKey+N - Moves focus to the Network Neighborhood icon (beats me why it doesn't actually open it, just hit enter...)

WinKey+Pause/Break - Display your system properties box
 Then you can also set your own shortcut keys, maybe Ctrl+Alt+D to open an MS-DOS prompt, Ctrl+Alt+X for XtreeGold (ALL power users prefer this to Windows Explorer...). Best bit is it keeps all those annoying shortcuts off your desktop, so you can truly appreciate all the cool wallpaper you've downloaded off the Web :-)

Brian Grinter

Britannia burns as Player Killing statistics take on new high

ONLINE ANARCHY

Virtual Society in Chaos

Despite the wonders of the Internet and the depth of new experiences it offers, one disheartening side effect is its ability to put you in contact with a greater portion of the world's wankers.

By Ashton Mills

McMansill...While harvesting wood in the forest (for it is his trade) he sees two grand master characters by the name of 'Flr3sT00M' and 'Lord Knobnuts' run past, stop, turn around and approach McMansill in battle mode. Three seconds later McMansill, and three weeks of playing, is but a corpse on the grass

Once upon time, online forums such as IRC and newsgroups were the only places that annoying people could practice their art, and they would normally be brutally put down in the interests of keeping the peace. However, with the advent of online gaming, and specifically large multiplayer gaming, it was only a matter of time before these genetic mistakes managed to pollute the greatest evolution in gaming since Space Invaders.

The Problem

What's the issue here? The greatest sacrilege, people who don't play games for games sake. Aye brothers and sisters, you heard right! There are people out there who play online games not for the enjoyment of the game, but for the opportunity to bolster their self esteem at all costs, specifically; at the cost of other players.

We're talking about player killers, tank rushers and cheaters. It all depends on the game, but the mentality is the same. It's been speculated that people who play like this are anti-social, have self esteem problems or simply have no respect for the human beings on the other end of the line. Whatever the reasons, their kind are hated everywhere.

Ultima Offline

If you've played Ultima Online you'll know exactly what I mean. A common scenario runs something like this:

Newbie player is quite pleased with his three week old character, McMansill. While harvesting wood in the forest (for it is his trade) he sees two grand master characters by the name of 'Flr3sT00M' and 'Lord Knobnuts' run past, stop, turn around and approach McMansill in battle mode. Three seconds later McMansill, and three weeks of playing, is but a corpse on the grass and he, as a ghost, has two choices: resurrect and be killed again by the pair or wander as a ghost looking for a healer, risking a stat drop and leaving his belongings behind (which the PKs

didn't take, he had nothing worth taking). Newbie player is understandably upset that he paid for the whole experience and doesn't renew his account with Origin.

Sadly this isn't just common, it's the norm. Why should people pay money to have weeks of gameplaying lost in an instant? Should PKers be banned? Aren't they playing in the limits of the game engine? Who's to blame for the situation?

The spirit of the game

In the case of UO the delinquent is clear — the world represents a virtual adventure, bad people can exist as well as good, and removing the PK element removes an aspect of the game's reality. However there's a distinct difference between gamers who roleplay bad characters and gamers who are simply bad gamers. A roleplayed thief will try to steal first and kill only if necessary. They wouldn't target a newbie because a newbie has nothing to steal. They'd use a name that fits in with the game universe and yell things like 'Thy money or thy life!' when they threaten. Gamers who roleplay good characters welcome gamers who roleplay bad characters. There's no respect held for 'Flr3sT00M' and his buddies with their abbreviated warez chat and their total lack of concern for the gaming environment.

The few spoil it for the whole

However, it's not always so cut and dried. What about other games that are affected like Diablo (player killing, cheats), Warcraft (unit rushing), Red Alert (tank rushing), Interstate 76 (cheats), Total Annihilation (flash tank rushing), BattleZone (bomber rushing), Jedi Knight (hacks) and so on? Are the games at fault or the players?

Newsgroup reaction

The debate is a very hot topic, so hot in fact that when this PCPP writer posed the question in some of the more popular gaming newsgroups to hear what the players have to say, a very long and complicated thread was started.

These are some of the comments made by gamers:

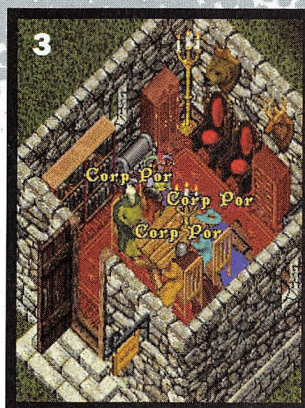
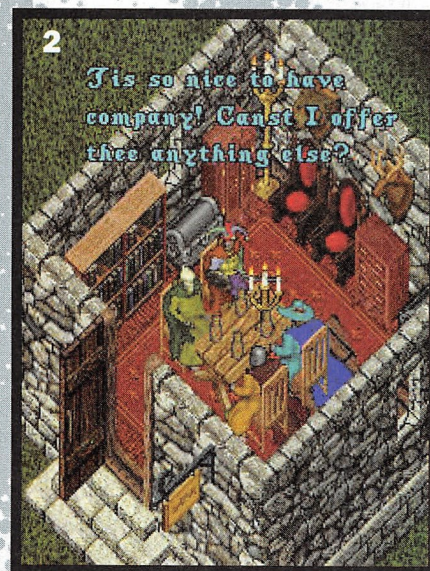
"Rushes do ruin these games because I feel like I just wasted my time. It is not a strategy to build one unit and send it into another base in the first ten minutes of playing. That would make the advanced units worthless. Since there are advanced units, that means that the games are intended to use those units."

*"Tank rushers and player killers *are* playing by the rules."*

"Maybe if the games had been properly balanced in the first place, tank rushing wouldn't be a problem. Why are people ticked off that someone has figured out the 'best' strategy and [gasp] actually uses it? As for player killing on UO, that isn't so much a problem, but rather a symptom of the multitude of other problems that UO has."

"The problem with UO is the 14 year old Quake-heads that bring their mentality to the game."

"If this were a board game that allowed a deviant strategy to easily win the game, people would decry the game as flawed (at the very



People get upset because expectations are broken. Gamers play UO with the expectation that other players will be of equal maturity and desire to roleplay. Gamers expect the game engine to handle situations beyond the design of the engine

least). It's a computer game, though, so people blame those who use the deviant strategy. Sorry, I don't buy that. The game's flawed."

"Ultima Online wasn't ruined by player-killing. It was ruined by stat-duping, item-duping, bug exploitation galore and general lack of courtesy for your fellow man."

Any problems UO had with player-killing derived from the fact that they allowed player-killing within the rules and then created a game-design which made advancement tedious and time-consuming for most people but allowed people who killed other players to advance quickly by accumulating wealth and increase stats quickly. To design a game like this and claim it is an RPG is a bit misleading. An RPG of what? Hell on earth?"

"There's no point in playing if someone else is out to have 'fun' by removing your fun."

These few comments show the depth of the issue. Suffice to say the online gaming community managed to hit the nail on the head. Yes, the problem can be linked to the underage (or under developed) players playing their way when the game environment or other players expect something more mature. Yes, it's the engine's fault for not taking this into consideration. Yes, it's fair to play that

way. Yes, they're paying customers. And so on.

Who's to blame?

But all these observations make an assumption one way or another. People get upset because expectations are broken. Gamers play UO with the expectation that other players will be of equal maturity and desire to roleplay. Gamers expect the game engine to handle situations beyond the design of the engine. Gamers expect others to follow unwritten rules. Gamers expect to get their paid enjoyment out of a game.

The key problem then is not the existence or the capability of player killers, tank rushers and cheats but of players that don't roleplay, use strategy or play within the game limits. There are two types of players here: those that play a game for games sake and those that don't. It's the former who cry foul when the latter ruin the gaming element they paid for.

The problem lies squarely in the hands of both the game developers and the players. Perhaps it's just a condition of the times, with online gaming taking off in new ways and environments that haven't been seen before. It's something new to experiment with, and until it becomes the norm we're going to get all sorts of



The Australian strip, BoN3DooD and pLaTeDeWd, taking role playing to new levels... NOT!

gamers trying out all sorts of online games.

How can you stop it?

To be blunt, you can't. You can't force people to play a certain way, you can't design a game engine to foresee all possibilities, you can't put restrictions on your customers and you can't choose who you play with — or can you?

Unless it's a massive online environment like UO, the best and only solution is the simplest: play with pals.

Playing with people you know and trust ensures fair gameplay, agreed understanding of the games rules and limitations and, more importantly than anything else, guaranteed satisfaction from the game the way it was meant to be enjoyed.

If online play with people across the globe is your thing, stick to the guidelines and look out for lamers wanting a quick win. Don't play gamers who demand out of the ordinary game stats - force the default metal and energy values in Total Annihilation for example and you'll quickly separate the strategists from the tank rushers - they won't play you because they need high starting values to pump out tanks, and haven't got the skill to play any other way.

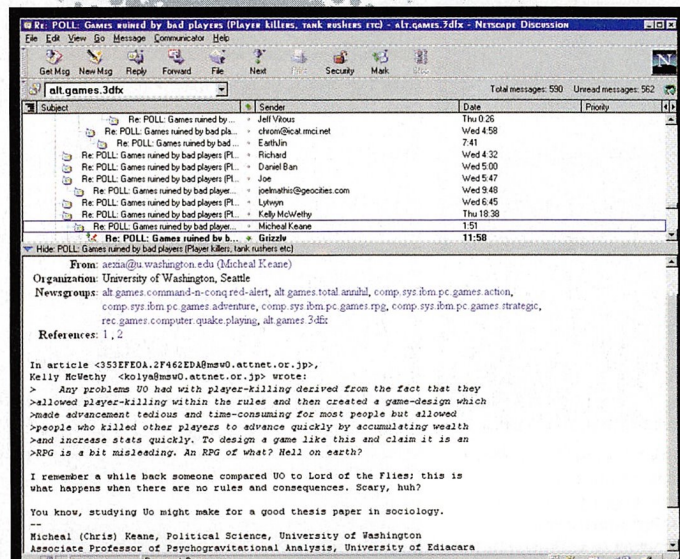
Which side are you?

Some gamers have taken to voice


their opinions on the Web in the best possible way — with humour. Two sites in particular have done very well in expressing the inherent problems of UO through sarcasm and wit: Tyron's Imanewbie site and Australia's own Bonedood and Platedewd (spelt BoN3DooD and pLaTeDeWd, a UO version of Beavis and Butthead).

Imanewbie (<http://diablo2.gagames.com/tryon/imamain.html>) demonstrates all too well the problems of being a newbie player in a world populated by players who don't care for the roleplaying or adventure in UO while Bonedood and Platehead (<http://www.adelaide.net.au/~nene/bp/>) plant the blame firmly in the PKers field by presenting a pair of characters who talk in warez chat and have no concern for anything, least of all their fellow players.

So ask yourself, which side are you? Do you play for the sake of the game or do you play for the sake of your ego? And do you think the games are at fault or the players? Write in and tell us your thoughts, and if they're really insightful we'll publish them for all to see.



It seems that one of the biggest hurdles to overcome is for players to stop thinking in 'single player' mode, where they are the centre of the universe, and realise that the pictures on the screen are other people, of a sort.



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BUILD YOUR OWN WEB PAGE

An introduction to the Hippie Editor - *FREE on this month's CD!*

How do you become a part of cyberspace? A Web Page to call your very own, something to marvel at and show to all your friends? And when you do get it, what do you do with it? Read on cyber traveller, and find your place to land.

Staking your claim

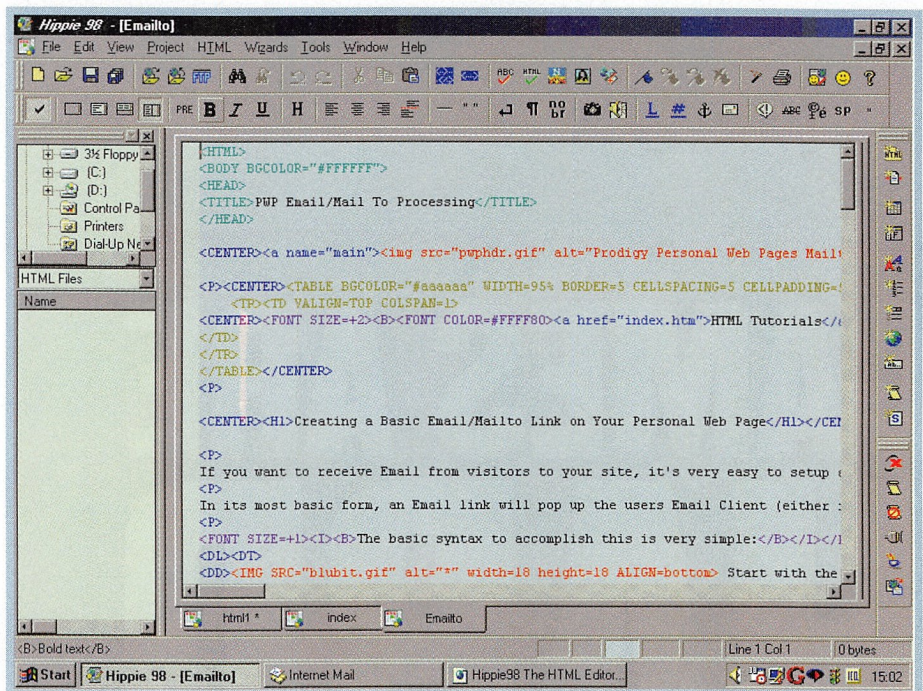
First you need some space for your site. Using your own PC is possible, but is generally not a good idea since you'll have to stay connected 100% of the time. There are, however, plenty of Web Servers around who will give you some space free. First stop should probably be your Internet provider. Failing that, you could check out <http://www.geocities.com> or <http://www.angelfire.com>, these sites will happily give you five megabytes to play with, so long as you keep within their lax guidelines.

HTML, the language of the Web

Almost all documents on the Web are presented in HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language) For you to create your own web page, you'll have to have at least a basic understanding of how it works, as we'll explain later though, there are tools to help you out immensely. HTML is basically a text file which a Browser (ie, the program you use to access other web sites) interprets to produce a web page, and that's all you really need to know. HTML can be edited from any text editor, which makes it very cheap, but it's also a hassle to learn all the ins and outs of the language itself. There must be an easier way, and yes there is; it is called Hippie q8.

Using the Hippie Editor

The Hypertext Interactive Personal Page Integrated Editor, or Hippie for short is a great way to make your web site easily, quickly and professionally. Hippie 97 is on this month's CD, and you can



download the 98 upgrade for no charge at the Trout Software website. Having done that, you'll open up the most intuitive web site design program ever - a very bold, but very true statement.

Easy to use

Hippie's interface is probably the best ever, Hippie is actually an editor and browser all in one. This is extremely handy in that you don't have to switch to your browser every time you make a change to see how it looks.

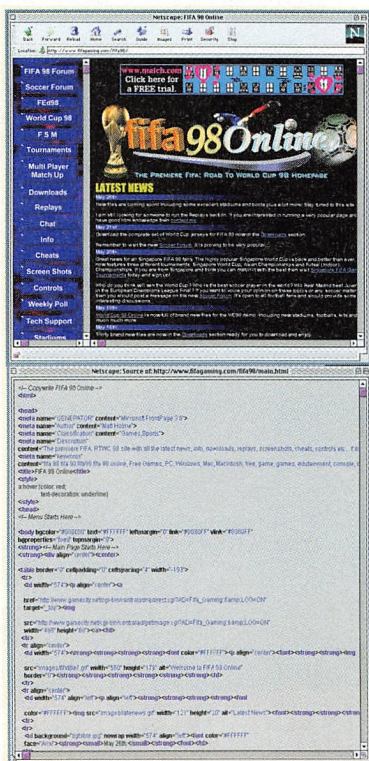
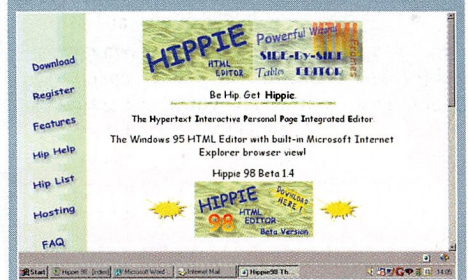
On one side of the Hippie screen is the actual Hyper Text, and on the other is the browser interpreted version, as you edit your text, the browser is affected real time so you can see immediately what you have done. This is a massive time saver on the old method of two programs running together, finding prob-

lems is much faster since you will know much earlier if something isn't operating as it should, saving time and frustration looking for that minor glitch in the system.

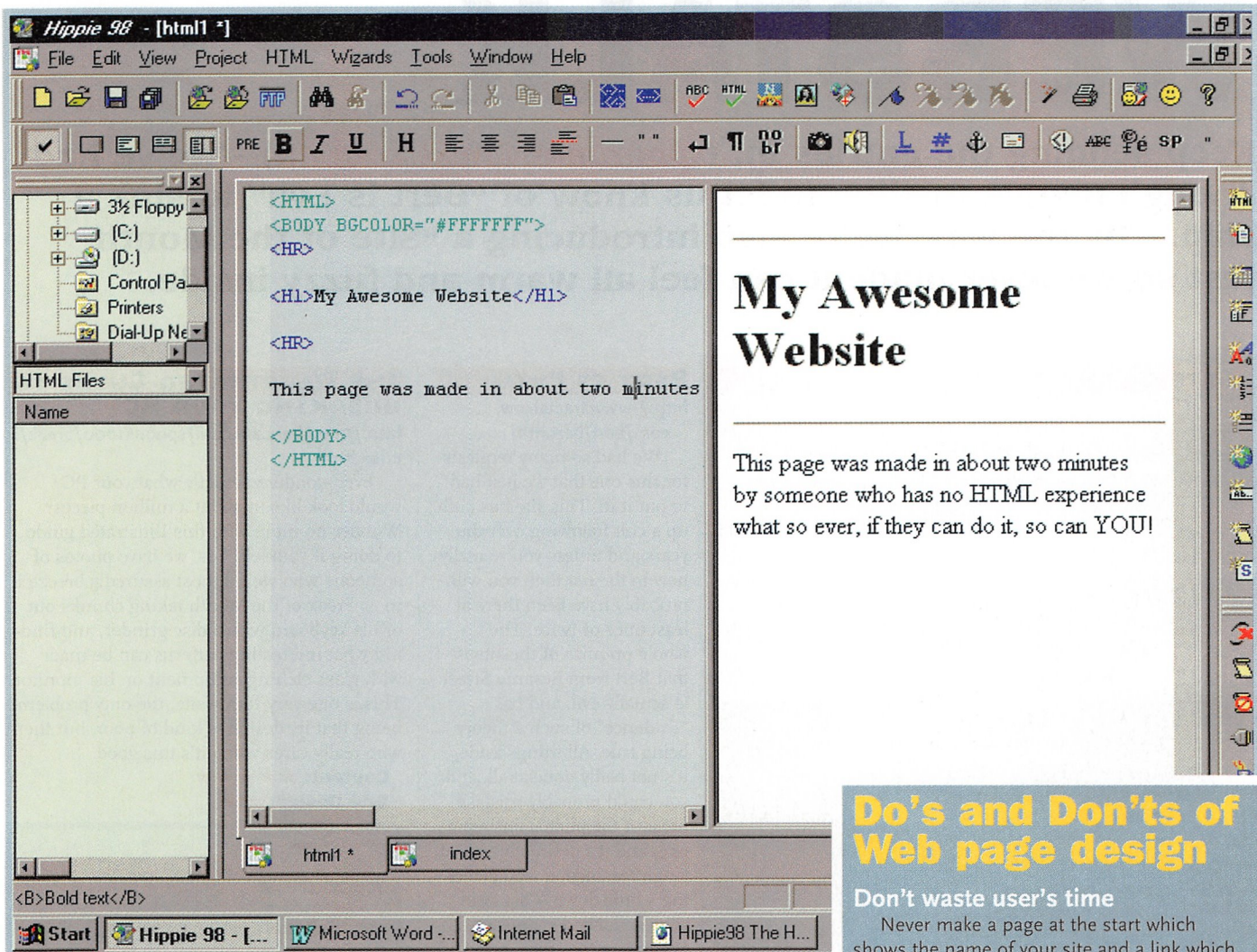
Hippie offers all the power of any other Web Page editor and probably more so. Because it's so intuitive, it can be picked up in a matter of seconds by someone who has no idea what HTML is. To prove this, we got someone who had never touched HTML before to sit in front of Hippie 98 for a few minutes. With no help at all from us they

Hippie Online

The Hippy Website is located at <http://www.troutsoft.com/hippie>. The best part of this site is that you can upgrade your Hippy 97 to Hippy 98 Beta, which includes a host of new features such as a colour coded editor, Internet Explorer 4.0 compatability, Javascript Wizards and a whole lot more. We upgraded to Hippy 98 for this Online, and you should too. It's free!



You can view the source code of any web page. Just find the 'view page source' option in your web browser.



Do's and Don'ts of Web page design

Don't waste user's time

Never make a page at the start which shows the name of your site and a link which says "Click here to enter". These pages are annoying and waste your space, and everyone else's time.

Keep it efficient

Make your page easy to navigate, put all related information and links in the one spot, otherwise people won't bother looking for stuff.

Respect your users

By all means put sound files on your page, but don't make them start up when the page is accessed, hearing the Midi of "Smoke on the Water" at two in the morning is enough to frighten anyone.

Group pages logically

Don't make any single page too long, it's way better to make a long page into three or four short ones, it's much easier to find stuff that way.

Don't steal ideas

You can borrow ideas from other people, but don't blatantly copy them. You want your page to stand out, not look like everything else (Look at Hyper@ctive for instance). When you do borrow ideas, give whoever had them first the credit they deserve.

Be imaginative

Be creative, if you want people to think your page is cool, do something different, have fun with it. Never stop adding bits!



Angelfire- one of the many places which offer free web page hosting

Built-in tutorials

By now you're probably asking yourself "Is there actually anything wrong with Hippie?" and honestly the answer would have to be no, we couldn't find any features which could topple it from the throne of Web Site design. From the first line of text, to posting your page to the web, Hippie will be with you all the way. If you don't know what you're doing, the early tutorials will tell you what's going on without talking down to you, and without being too advanced for the newer user. Later on, you'll find some great information which you probably wouldn't

have found otherwise lurking within their pages.

The interface? Brilliant, if you know Microsoft Word then you'll fit right in to Hippie's slick design which is very professional might we add, so professional that some people who walked past us thought it was Microsoft Word, we're not sure if they were complimenting it or not...

All in all, Hippie is great, if you're already a Web Page expert or if you've never even touched one it's still for you, grab it off the CD, get the upgrade off the site and you're away. Nothing will hold you back with this tools at your finger tips, definitely not a 1970's reject.

came up with the basic, but functional web site you see in the screenshot. It's clear that anyone with even a little bit of knowledge could produce something great with Hippie, and the tutorials are good enough to give someone that amount of knowledge in almost no time.

Fancy not typing anything at all? Hippie has Templates for almost any Hyper Text object you can think of, this is especially good because it means you don't actually have to "learn" any HTML if you don't want to. If you want a heading just go to the HTML menu and select Heading, fill in the name and you're done, that's all there is to it.

WEBSTALK

Keep sending the entries in, (spoonman@next.com.au) - we've had enough people mailing to let us know of "Bert is Evil" to sink a ship... By the way, we're also introducing a "Site of the Month" just so whoever made it can feel all warm and fuzzy inside.

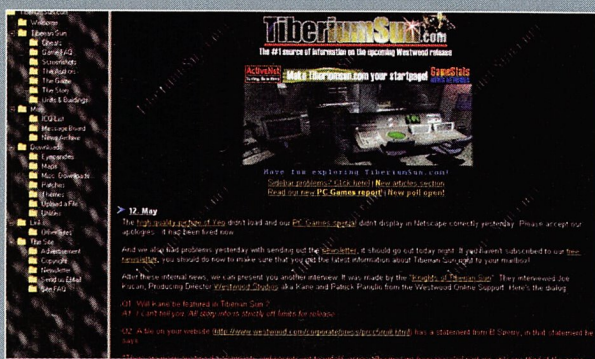
SITE OF THE MONTH

<http://www.tiberiansun.com> (Sent by Euan Bonner)

Tiberian Sun is probably the biggest talking point online at the moment, and this non official site has the goods. It's got all the screenshots, all the info and it looks like it has been done professionally. The number one spot for Command & Conquer 2 info has to be here. They also have a mailing list so you don't have to keep checking and it's updated quite often. Visit here now for everything C&C2, including rare interviews from the people who are making the game and all sorts of other tidbits you probably won't find anywhere else. A top site.

Content: ★★★★★

Site Design: ★★★★★



BERT IS EVIL:

<http://www.fractalcow.com/bert/bert.htm>

We had so many requests for this one that we just had to put it in. This site has built up a cult following over the years and unless you're really new to the net then you will probably have been there at least once or twice. The whole premise of the site is that Bert from Sesame Street is actually evil, and has "Evidence" of such a theory being true. All things aside, it's not badly done at all, and you could probably mistake most of the photos for being real, and it's definitely a good laugh for anyone who is feeling a little down. Cast away your childhood visions of Bert being the "nice guy" and head on over to find out the real story. (Sent by almost everyone)

Content: ★★★★★

Site Design: ★★★★★



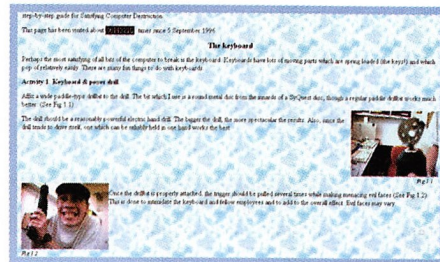
THE ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO BREAKING YOUR PC

<http://members.aol.com/spoons1000/break/index.html>

Ever wondered exactly what your PC would look like in about a million pieces? Wonder no more with this Illustrated guide to doing it yourself! Yes, we have photos of someone who would most assuredly breeze it in as Freak of the Month taking chunks out of his keyboard with a disc grinder, and finding what interesting patterns can be made with glass etching equipment on his monitor. This is one very funny site, the only problem being that its design is kind of poor, but then who really cares when it's this good.

Content: ★★★★★

Site Design: ★★★★★



QUAKE.AU:

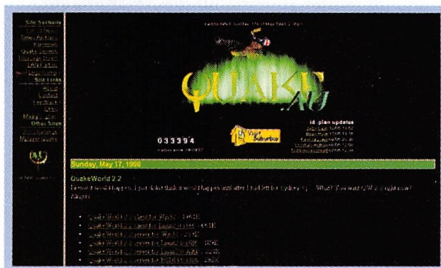
<http://www.quake-au.net>

This month's token Quake site has an Australian flavour, which alone makes it good, but it's also funny as well as being informative and it's a great read.

Sean "Malby" Malloy keeps the site updated regularly with whatever is new and happening, it also contains a very popular message board, which, if you don't mind the odd expletive (well, maybe more than the odd one) is a great read as well. The site contains a link to the "Australian Challenge", which will attempt to pit Australian Quake masters against the likes of Thresh over a high speed net connection.

Content: ★★★★★

Site Design: ★★★★★



FARTS.COM

<http://www.farts.com>

Juvenile behaviour is always fun when you've got nothing else to do, and this fits the bill nicely when you've got nothing else to do. Yes that's right, download your favourite fart and compare them with your own, have competitions with people around the globe via email, send your own farts in and become world famous because of flatulence. (Sent by Smelly Luke Ortmann)

Content: ★★★★★

Site Design: ★★★★★

Rod Campbell





Back Issues

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#1 Online fighter combat, Duke 3D, Grand Prix 2, Warcraft 2 playguide.

#2 Kali net games, Earthsiege 2, Zork Nemesis, C&C playguide.

#3 3D graphic accelerators, Settlers 2, Cyberstorm, Zork Nemesis walkthrough.

#4 PC buyers guide, Australian Rugby League, Normality, Spycraft walkthrough.

#5 Net games, Time Commando, Close Combat, Civ 2 strategy guide.

#6 Best and worst games of all time, Quake, Pandora Directive, Flight sim roundup.

#7 Violence in games, Mechwarrior Mercenaries, Krush Kill 'n Destroy, MMX Pentiums

#8 Making of a Game, Video Card feature, C&C Red Alert, Privateer 2.

#9 Red Alert Feature, Alphaworld, Wavetable soundcards, Tomb Raider, Syndicate Wars.

#10 New Star Wars games, 3D accelerators compared, DIY Upgrade guide, Discworld 2

#11 Diablo, Interstate '76, MMX Pentiums examined, Build your own PC and network, Dark Reign.

#12 MDK, Quake Mission Packs, Huge Joystick guide, Internet Newsgroups, Ecstatica 2.

#13 Need for Speed II, X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter, Quake addons, PCs versus Consoles debate, Online game hackers.

#14 Dark Reign, Doom Clones, 16 Modems tested, Derek Smart, Comanche 3, Redneck Rampage.

#15 Carmageddon, E3 Report, Tomb Raider 2 preview, Blood & Sex

#16 Dungeon Keeper, RPG feature, Lands of Lore II preview, Virtual Reality, Last Express playguide

#17 Age of Empires, 500MHz Pentiums, Starfleet Academy, Beam Software, Software Piracy

#18 Jedi Knight, Total Annihilation, Hexen II, Quake addon megaguide

#19 Blade Runner, Tomb Raider 2, AFL '98, 3D CPUs, Quake 2 first look

#20 TOCA Touring Cars, Heavy Gear, FIFA '98, Next-Gen 3D cards, Dark Reign Playguide Pt.I

#21 Quake II, Intel's EPIC new CPU, I-War, Monkey Island 3, Multi vs Single player gaming debate, Dark Reign Playguide Pt.2

#22 Battlezone, 1GHz hot chips, Ultima Online Chronology & Tour guide, Starcraft Beta, Unreal, Quake 2 playguide

#23 Forsaken preview, Obsidian 3Dfx cards, i740 3D accelerators, Adventure, games, Red Baron II

#24 Tiberian Sun preview, Voodoo II cards benchmarked, Blade Runner playguide, Rebellion, Incoming

#25 Starcraft, Forsaken, Motherboard Benchmark, Lifestyle of a True Gamer, Virtual Reality, Soccer Games

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WIN A 32 BIT PCI SOUND CARD!

The InnoVISION Letter of the Month wins the new LEAF 32 bit/3D sound card, using the Maestro ESS Wavetable chipset. PCI 32 bit sound leaves old ISA Sound Blaster technology for dead, freeing your CPU for faster gameplay. Valued at \$199, ph InnoVISION on 03 58318833 for more info, or visit www.innoVISION.com.au.



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Quest for the Perfect Game

I decided to write this letter after reading the Diversions article on "Ultima Collection" written by David Wildgoose in the May issue. I couldn't agree with him more when he said that UVII is the best RPG ever made. His article brought back my memories of a great and long adventure in a world known as Britannia. Back then I had my 486 DX2, I still remember the long hours spent on configuring the memory and settings in order to play UVII. I think of it as the first quest for the game, the quest for conventional memory. It's a time consuming task but it really taught a lot, and you become so happy when the game finally works.

After that everything else in my life just sort of stopped, I am talking about 12-14 hours a day of non-stop adventuring, 2 meals a day in front of the computer, the palm of my hand got so red and sore from rubbing against the mouse that I had to wrap it in a towel to play. I spent most of the time just travelling across the land to explore dungeons and forests, it was a great experience to immerse yourself in that wonderful world. UVII just had so much depth and what makes it so addictive is the sheer interactivity. When I lost money in the casino in Buccaneer's Den I just killed everyone in the casino to

show my feelings toward the computer cheating. I had so much fun when using the cannon from Lord British's Castle to blow up innocent little kids (I only did it once just to see if the cannon works, I resurrected him afterwards and said sorry). It remains one of my favourite games of all times and I gave it the Best RPG Ever.

Now I am hooked on UO, which I play everyday, it had a lot in common with UVII except the virtual guard and the lag. I read that a lot of people are suing Origin for the game crashes and lags, I feel disgusted at that. I think it's amazing how they can bring thousands of players together into one gorgeous looking game over the internet, nothing can be perfect, people should cut Origin some slack for the occasional crash and some lag.

James Gao

Being one of the most innovative and original computer games ever, Ultima Online has predictably upset some gamers. UO simply can't deliver the experience promised - but it comes mighty close and for 95% of the time, gamers such as yourself are in online heaven. Whether it's a laggy online game or a single-player game that badly needs patching, no game has ever been perfect. So we struggle to get the most out of the product as we can - it's the way of the game, and as games become more complex and technically sophisticated the problem will be magnified. Fewer, better games may be the answer, but we also want the steady stream of releases we're used to. Sure, we want it all, and sure, we'll never have it. Life's like that...

I am the Key Master

The keyboard is a mighty piece of gaming glory! Yes, I love the keyboard and I play successfully with it in deathmatch Quake, both I and II, almost every weekend and have been doing so for around 6 weeks. I bought Quake II a week before Xmas and have been at the top of the deathmatching table every week since. I play at a local computer store on Saturday mornings against about 8 people each time. I reassure you that they are also hardcore gamers like myself and have played deathmatch many times before. I use the keyboard and nothing but the keyboard and yes you freak'n can circle strafe with this marvellous piece of hardware. Look at the right shift key, go

INNOVISION LETTER OF THE MONTH

When is a Pentium II not a Pentium II

Until recently I was under the impression that re-marked CPUs were mainly a Socket 7 problem. This was until I had the misfortune of purchasing a re-marked Pentium II CPU. It was an OEM P2-300 that was very competitively priced. "Mmm... too cheap to pass up" I thought. I started to become suspicious when games began to crash for no apparent reason.

My suspicions were confirmed when I ran a program called ctp2info, developed by the German magazine c't. It showed that a function called ECC (error correction) was not present on my chip. All P2 chips, 300 and upwards come with ecc (some P2-233/266 chips have ECC also, but they are not very common). The second indicator was the CPUID not matching the S-spec# written on the CPU casing. According to Intel if your S-spec# is sl2mz then the CPUID should be 0633, but mine was 0634. This proved beyond all doubt that mine was a fake.

The next day I promptly rang up the business I bought it from and told the proprietor that he had sold me a fake chip. The owner was very grateful that I had brought this to his attention because he had already sold a few other chips from the same batch and was using one himself. We tried the program on his chip and it turned out to be a fake also. To the owner's credit he was very prompt in replacing my CPU with a real one. This little episode highlights what is becoming a major problem, bigger than Intel would have you believe.

I hope someone can benefit from my experience. For further information on re-marked chips check out www.prodesk.com/inside/.

Pete Harvey

We were afraid it wouldn't be long before fake P2 chips started to make their way down under. What really annoys us is that a less experienced person than yourself would have no way to actually check what rated speed P2 they really have. There is no simple way for a buyer to check that the P2 they brought is really what the shop says it is. The easiest way is to insist on a retail version of the CPU which comes pre-shrink wrapped from Intel. This still isn't 100% effective, but it becomes a lot harder to introduce fakes than with the CPU-only OEM style packaging. What needs to be done is for Intel to mark the CPUs with a non-removable stamp (ultraviolet?) so vendors can do checks very easily on their stocks.

Intel's current plan for dealing with the problem is to simply clock-lock all their CPUs. It would be a great tragedy if Intel decided to totally clock-lock all their processors. The overclockers out there would be very unhappy indeed. Maybe Intel could include a CPUID function that returns a rated clock speed and will actually inform the user through the BIOS with a warning if the CPU is overclocked. That way everyone's happy - even the overclockers among us who don't usually pay much attention to those warnings anyway. Well Intel, the ball's in your court...

left 2 keys and you will see the "<" and ">" keys these are the keys that move you left or right and thus you can circle strafe! So I say to you mouse freaks the keyboard rules!

Adam Prasser

The Nerds are alright

I'd like to start by having a go at all parents with teenage kids. Why do they think computer games are bad for teenagers? Look parents, your choices are:

- 1) Your kid sits at home all day watching Baywatch and sleeping.
- 2) Your kid goes out every night, without telling you where they're going. Then at 3am you get a call from a drunk who wants a lift home from the train station. On arrival you find your kid half naked on the track shouting at a crowd of onlookers.
- 3) At an early age your son/daughter become interested in chess and reading. At 13 he's rejected by his/her classmates. At 14 it gets physical and his/her

whole school takes up kicking him in their spare time. It gets too much, he stays at home all day, realises that his only friends are books and is one day found hanging in the garage beside his vacuum cleaner.

4) Your offspring stays with the crowd and takes interest in computers. Not satisfied with Dune 2, they spend all their money on upgrading, buy C&C Red Alert, Warcraft 2, etc. All of which doesn't leave him enough time to go out and drink and use drugs, but it gives him something to talk about with his friends. And he lives happily ever after.

Now obviously (4) is the best option.

Stuart Millington

Getting Games Going Good

Normally I don't write to magazines, tend to mind my own business, but, Terry Slattery's letter in issue 24 really got me by the short and curlies because I know where he is coming from. I am 44 years old and play games every day. I have Quake 2 and run it on a Pentium 133 and Monster 3D, it runs great Terry. Therefore, to help Terry, I wish to mention a few points and then I will get all emotional, and all that stuff.

1. A good 3Dfx card is the way to go for sure, but make sure it is added to a good 2D card. I have a Diamond Monster 3D/S3 combination and the S3 card can't hack it, getting a replacement this week.

2. There are patches for Quake 2 to V3.10 and V3.13 which both make heaps of improvements, including speed and compatibility.

3. If you get a Monster 3D or the like, the 3Dfx drivers are built into the game. Voodoo is fastest to get, and there is a Voodoo patch for the Monster 3D card called D3RTVG.EXE available from the internet - it is brilliant!

Now for my gripe. I too, am fed up with the computer cowboys out there - no, I am not a trader. I am disabled, unable to work, who only has his computer games and his games. All 400 of my games are registered - pirates bugger off!

I have been in the same boat myself with software, and every time sellers blame the software. It has taken me 3 years and heaps of time, stress and aggression to find a decent shop to deal with. The worst place to get software is from a department store, unless you are

100% positive your computer can handle the game. Idea: Don't buy a game until you have tested the demo from the Internet or better still PC PowerPlay magazine, that's what I do. My personal advice to Terry is to get his computer checked out at an independent Computer repair point (Pentium 233s are not always good Pentium 233s), emphasizing bugs, viruses, incompatibilities, defective hardware, RAM, cache plus hardware configurations and memory addresses. All these issues are for the professionals.

All the computer retailers that are 'cowboys' please go back to selling your second hand cars. You are wasting our money and nerves. If you were car salesmen we wouldn't buy your cars, so why should we buy computers from you?

So, in closing - before I find my soap box - GL Quake is king and PC PowerPlay is god in magazine heaven. Thanks for the mag fellas - my life is built around this 'bible'.

Anonymous

We don't usually print letters from you, Anonymous, but your angst hit a spot we know too well. In life you need a good accountant, a good mechanic and a good computer game advisor. We humbly offer our services for the latter.

Dark Reign - RTS or Linear Puzzle?

I have read the praise flowing in for Dark Reign and I reckon it's time to even up the record a bit. The strategy (and I use that term loosely) guide you published for Dark Reign went something like this:

Send units to points A, B and C. Sell D to get credits and an E, Build an F in position G, build another F in position H but sell the F in position I. Build 15 other things in precise positions J to K, when you get to state X sell everything to fall across the line (Mission 5: Kendrick Water Assault).

The hints page for most of the RPG/Adventure games sound almost identical:

Do X, Y and Z, follow the convoluted and obscure path to reach W and press the magic switch labelled T type of thing.

Now, having played Dark Reign and becoming frustrated at the "one way and one way only" type solutions for the scenarios, I



got to thinking that the single player scenarios have about as much strategy in them as playing Putt Putt Golf. Make one slip-up or deviate from the path and go back to the beginning (hit reload). Dark Reign does not qualify as a RTS game with that kind of tortuous problem solving.

The idea of selling everything at the last minute to complete the objective is a farce. Okay, so some linearity is unavoidable, but the C&C missions crap all over Dark Reign (apart from the infiltration type missions) for single player mode, and I had more fun bumbling around with Warcraft than trying to unravel the Dark Reign puzzles.

Dungeon Keeper, despite all of its publicised faults, was a far better strategy game than single player Dark Reign. What makes RTS work? The hammer, scissors and rock principle that's what! C&C had it, Warcraft had it, but Dark Reign didn't. Sad really, so much promised, so little delivered. Perhaps they should have put "No AI needed, this is a multiplayer strategy game only" on the pack.

Enough said. By the way, thanks for a great magazine. Dang, I learn a lot from the fine pages you put together each month. The tech articles are great. The reviews fair and the whole package a credit to you all.

Stuart Williams

Being old-school turn-based hex grid strategy gamers, we are always a little bothered by games which call themselves "strategy", but are in reality, action games - or possibly worse, as you have pointed out. Any game that causes you to lose units because you can't move your mouse fast enough has no right to describe itself as "strategy".

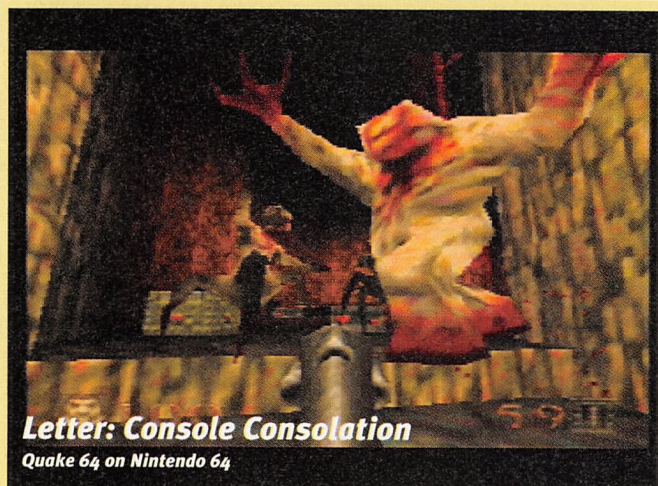
It's All So Expensive!

99% of the time, 99% of the computer game playing public would not voice opinions to you, or anybody else, with regards to the state of the nation in computer gaming. I've now become one of the 1% and hopefully I will feel much better, even though it will probably make no difference to the manufacturers of software/hardware.

Software is so overpriced most people cannot afford to purchase all of the 'good' games that are released, when they carry price tags of \$89 or even \$99. Recently there have been significant falls in the price of some games Dark Reign/Total Annihilation, to mention just two. Surely these price reductions indicate we are being overcharged at their original price, and secondly that they have risen as best sellers, so maybe that this is a more accessible price for the majority.

Hardware is promoted in all magazines. Not a problem, but at times the cost of the most desirable PC is extravagant (The Beast; \$12,000). My children play games (good games) and I use it for the internet and wordprocessing. I enjoy improving the computer through better equipment and programmes, but give me a break, can't anyone get hardware at medium cost to perform a task? \$700 for a 3D card is getting a bit extreme when my whole computer cost only \$1200. I cannot blink my eyes any faster to see the improvement. I know my letter may seem like a bit of a whinge, but after all that it would be nice to see some budget - mid priced assessments of hardware and pressure put on games manufacturers to be realistic.

Edward Dickson



Letter: Console Consolation

Quake 64 on Nintendo 64

Supply and demand, Edward, is why. Bad games get discounted soon after release, while AAA games (the best) stay at a premium pricepoint so long as they are still moving from the shop shelves at a respectable rate. It's the same with hardware, which is why the original Voodoo wasn't discounted, even though 3Dfx's initial investment was well and truly recouped. There are, however, always budget alternatives, we recently reviewed the Rendition V2100/2200 (available locally as the Hercules Thriller 3D and Diamond Stealth 2, respectively). This card offers near-3Dfx 3D performance in an all-in-one combo card at a reasonable price.

Quake: What's The Fuss?

Hmm. Quake and Quake 2. Why do people say that these quite similar games are different? Needless to say I must agree with the principle, 'too much of a good thing'. You see, I never liked Quake, there is no real depth, no story. I like story. Hell, I even liked Myst, I played it twice! I liked the original Tomb Raider until I saw that sorry excuse for an ending. I liked Star Trek: TNG "A Final Unity" by Microprose. There is one common aspect to these games; a story. A decent story that can hold up as believable (obviously within the universe the game is set) and make me want to play to the bitter end. Jedi Knight is probably the best game I have played. I don't care if you criticize the game, but a long one on one battle against a semi-smart final boss where you are really trying to out-duel him is something few games provide. Needless to say, I don't really enjoy online gaming as much as most people seem to do. Before

you call me strange and weird etc, please understand that this is personal taste, I prefer the epic games that last a while. Online gaming to me is what Quake or Duke 3D is except vs. human opponents, I honestly don't see a huge deal of promise in the genre beyond what it is now. Obviously there will be faster games and games that have better graphics etc, but the genre in my mind will not progress from the basic action genre. UO tried, but I have friends who kind of suggest that it is like living in an alternate world. This appealed to this friend, but now he is trying to sell his copy. The only games I would like to play linked are flight sims, where there is almost infinite potential for battles that twist more than a twistie! You might say this about Quake, but a flight sim means 3D movement and a limited lethality zone on each aircraft. At any one time the enemy can be below, above, beside, behind. You get the picture. To me Quake is only great in technological advancement, not the game design or story.

Rodney Pearce

Console Consolation

At school, I am always arguing with friends over the great PC v console debate. Trouble is, there's no way to make them understand. I tell them about the joys of 3D accelerated Quake 2, the multiplayer bliss that is Total Annihilation and the depth and atmosphere of games such as Blade Runner. But do they listen? No. They continually speak back about the price of PCs and the continual upgrade cycle. I don't believe this is a worthy accusation anymore though.

Anyone can get a decent PC with a 3Dfx for around \$1500. Sure, this is still over a \$1000 more than a Playstation, but it can do so much more. Internet, word processing, graphic design and so on. I believe however, the nail in the coffin for the consoles is multiplayer gaming. Is there a time in the near future that will see consoles being able to play against up to 64 people all over the world. Setting up an IPX network is a no brainer either, and equally as fun, being able to abuse your opponent in person.

Also, with the release of the Voodoo 2, console graphics will be left in the dust. The original Voodoo had graphics equal to, if not better than the N64. The Voodoo 2 is so much better again, and the N64 will be around for a couple more years yet. We might even see the Voodoo 3 or 4 by the time Nintendo gets a new machine out. I don't mind having to upgrade once or twice every two years if it keeps me on the cutting edge of technology.

Consoles do have their place however, and I do enjoy some of the games available, but they don't hold a candle to the 3D accelerated, internet capable, multiplayer gaming beast that is the PC.

Ewan Fleming

Face it brother, console gamers will simply never understand. Stricken with guilt over realising their \$300 injection-moulded toy is a dud, they've no choice but to desperately try and rationalise their purchasing decision. Still, these sad victims aren't total losers, for once they accept that their 'Station' is obsolete for games, some quick screwdriver and big hammer work on the innards and they've got themselves a perfectly good potty for baby.

Pay to Play

Ok, let's cut straight to the chase here. Origin, guys, what the hell are you doing? Last weekend I was at a game shop here in Adelaide, and I was contemplating buying a new PC game. Being a RPG nut who can't wait 'til Final Fantasy 7, I was about to buy a copy of Ultima Online, when, shock, horror, I read that there will be a monthly player charge for all users. Oh sure, 30 free days is all very nice, but my point is this; after paying \$80 for a game, that should be it! Origin must have some awfully big kahoonas if they expect us to buy the game, half fin-

ished, and then charge us for the privilege of playing it. They can't even do us the justice and give us a regional provider, why should we honour them with our cash? Combine this with costs of net hours, call costs etc. and online gaming may become too expensive for many (sort of justifies piracy in a round about way, they are cheating us after all). I ended up buying Dungeon Keeper, a great game that requires no extra cost to enjoy.

Then yesterday I was reading that the practice of making players pay for their games will only become more prevalent in the future. With companies like Microsoft only waking up now to how many of us gamers there are fragging, pillaging and maiming online, the future is looking bleak. I ask this of anybody who plays online, don't pay for it, no matter how good a provider is, chances are you've got a local provider nearby by you can which is going to be just as fast. Just go looking for it.

For games like Ultima, resist the temptation and don't buy it, sooner or later they will come to the party and life will be good again. As a warning to anyone considering making Quake3 pay to play I send this warning, Quakers are an extremely volatile bunch, easily angered and well trained in the art of fragging. Touch this game at your peril.

Lastly when playing Quake2 I like to generally abuse and harass the other players on the map. This may involve making statements about their questionable heritage, mouthing off about their performance or other assorted horse play. Now this is a tactic that works fabulously, but understandably people get upset. I say to them this; if you are reading the messages then you are not paying attention to the game and hence, are easily fragged. Also a player who is angry will take more chances and make more mistakes, accept it, ignore it and move on, otherwise you're fragged. BFG's are a part of the game too and all the fraggers who get upset about their use are usually the ones who can't find it or dodge it. Saying that you are cheating by using a BFG is bull-shit (anybody remember the fights at the local arcade when some used the throw too often on Street Fighter 2?), it's a part of the game, accept it and move on.

MPOK

COMPETITIONS

WIN A DIAMOND MONSTER 3DII VOODOO 2 & SPEC OPS



WHERE TO SEND

Write the answer, along with your name and address on the back of an envelope.

All entries close July 23, 1997

Entries to:

PC PowerPlay,
78 Renwick st.
Redfern NSW 2016

Issue # 24 winners

STAR WARS: REBELLION

ANSWER: NEIN NUMB SAID "ONE THOUSAND HERDS OF ELEPHANTS ARE STANDING ON MY FOOT" (IN A KENYAN DIALECT).

J. Leong - Ballarat, Vic
R. Kaplan - South Caulfield, Vic
D. Bradbrook - St Agnes, SA
R. Brockwell - Grafton, NSW
B. Grinter - Blacktown, NSW
S. Allchurch - Woodville, SA
(Your answer gave us the giggles)

DIGITAL EDGE F1 SIM COMPACT DRIVING WHEEL

ANSWER: M. BLUNDELL, E&C
FITTIPALDI, N. MANSELL, M
GUGELMIN, A. ZANARDI, M.
ANDRETTI, T. FABI, N. PIQUET, E.
CHEEVER (AMONGST OTHERS).
C. Boyd - Lutwyche, QLD
Miss Jane - East Keilor, Vic

BLACK DAHLIA

ANSWER: GEORGE KNOLTON.
M. Kinghorn - Craigmore, SA
J. Asquith - Cremorne, NSW
K. Jones - Kelso, Tas
D.R. O'Halloran - Moss Vale, NSW
M. Willox - Ruse, NSW
J. Fromberg - Dubbo, NSW
F. Tompkins - Merriton, SA
J. Wood - Nollamara, WA

2ND BIRTHDAY BLASTER PC

QUESTION: WHO WAS THE THIRD MAN TO SET FOOT ON THE MOON?
CHARLES "PETE" CONRAD JUNIOR,
MISSION LEADER OF APOLLO 12.
And the winner is....
Leon Gritter from Mortdale, NSW.

2 Diamond Monster 3DII 12MB Voodoo2's + 10 copies of Spec Ops

Spec Ops is a gem of a game - something a little different to the plethora of derivative games coming out. And best of all, you can play it co-op style, with you and friend as your 'wingman'. Thanks to the lovely people at GT Interactive and Diamond Multimedia we've got ten copies of this great game to give away along with 2 12MB Voodoo 2 video cards. The first two winners drawn will each receive a 12MB Diamond Monster 2 along with a copy of the game, and the following 8 winners will receive a copy of the game. All you have to do is answer the following question;

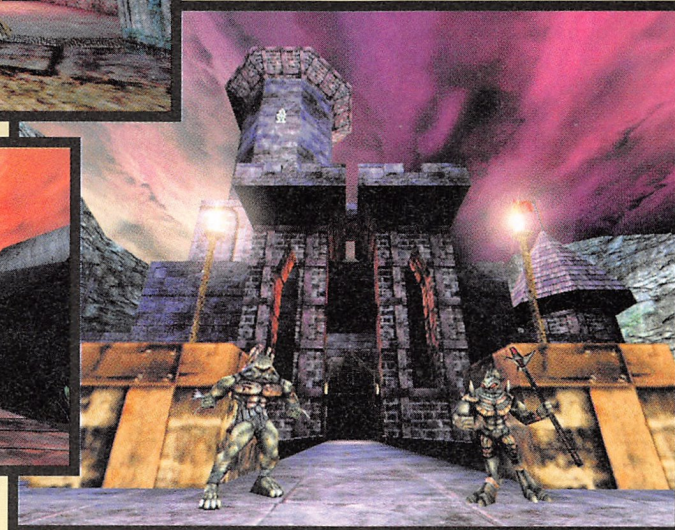
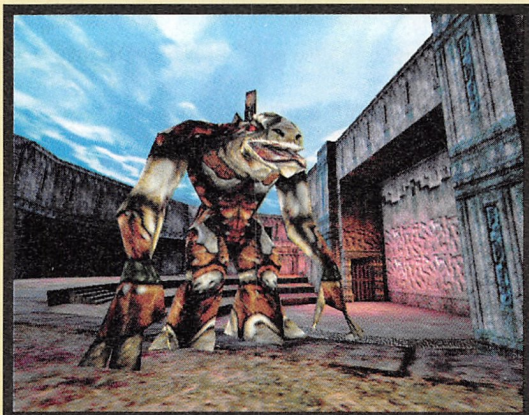
Q. What is a "Full Metal Jacket"?

10 copies of Unreal

Unreal is, quite simply, the best game we've ever seen. Forget Quake, forget Forsaken, for Unreal is the one. Full review on page 62, just in case you need extra convincing.

We've got 10 copies to give away, thanks to Roadshow.

Q. Which Comedy Company character popularised the term "unroll"?



WIZARD'S CROWN

SSI

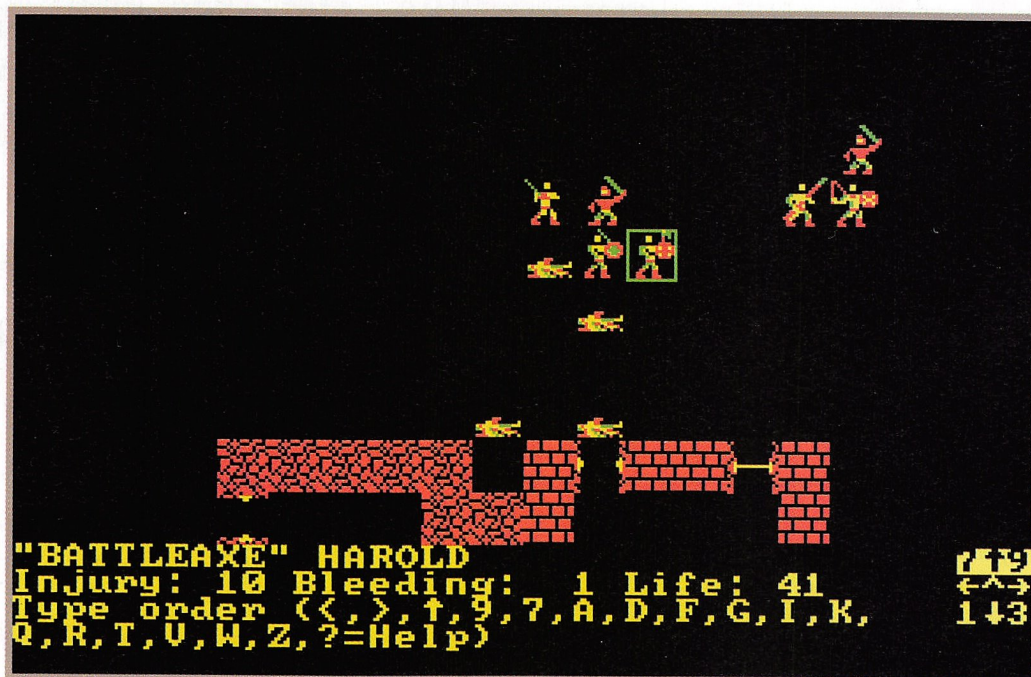
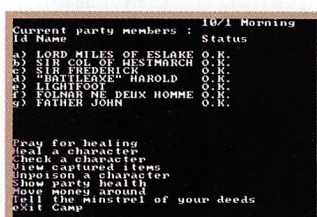
Year: 1985

Reqs: IBM PC XT, 256K RAM, CGA

Now this one brings back the memories for me. Laugh if you must, but I cannot even so much as look at the box, let alone try to play it, without coming over all misty-eyed and wobbly at the knees. You see, Wizard's Crown is the very first game I ever bought. Not sure exactly when I forked over the cash, but around 1986 sounds about right.

Back then this was hardcore, anal role-playing at its very best. Admittedly the competition wasn't up to much - Ultima in its earliest incarnation was lousy, while Bard's Tale was just a turn-based action game set in a maze - but Wizard's Crown still remained pretty darn special. Anyone with a passing interest in Dungeons & Dragons would have been impressed by the healthy amount of tables and charts present in the manual. Likewise, they would have appreciated the extensive array of skills available to learn and improve throughout the game - including everything from combat awareness to karma, from stealth to the ability to cure disease, and numerous weapon proficiencies as well.

Full player control over the distribution of experience points was not the novelty that it is today. Then, all it took was a brief pause at the nearest inn and you would emerge a stronger and wiser party of adventurers. Combat was, and perhaps still is, peerlessly



As exciting and gripping as it may have been at the time, the trip down nostalgia lane is not always as pleasant as you'd expect

detailed. Entirely turn-based, you could order your characters to do anything from guard against attacks, fall prone, scan for enemies, cast spells, dodge attacks or try to sneak somewhere, not to mention worrying about which way they were facing (cleverly, shields only protected their left and front sides, you see). There were even four completely different ways to initiate an attack!

So what's it like today? Well, I played it for a little while (after digging up and dusting off an old 5.25" floppy drive) and had mixed feelings. Obviously the graphics were rubbish - top down view of map, small tiles representing buildings and locations, dull black-on-white text screens for everything else - and



the sound went bleep very occasionally. Things were looking better as, upon engaging in a fight with a band of feral dogs, I thoroughly enjoyed the chance to partake in genuine tactical combat for a change. But then boredom returned as I remembered how tediously the plot unfolded, and how depressingly thin and hackneyed it was in the first place.

A sad journey back in time, then, for two reasons. One, the realisation that a once-loved RPG is, in fact, mostly crap. Two, that a 13 year old game still possesses a turn-based combat engine of sufficient quality to put most recent efforts to shame (including Might & Magic VI). Not all classics can stand the test of time.

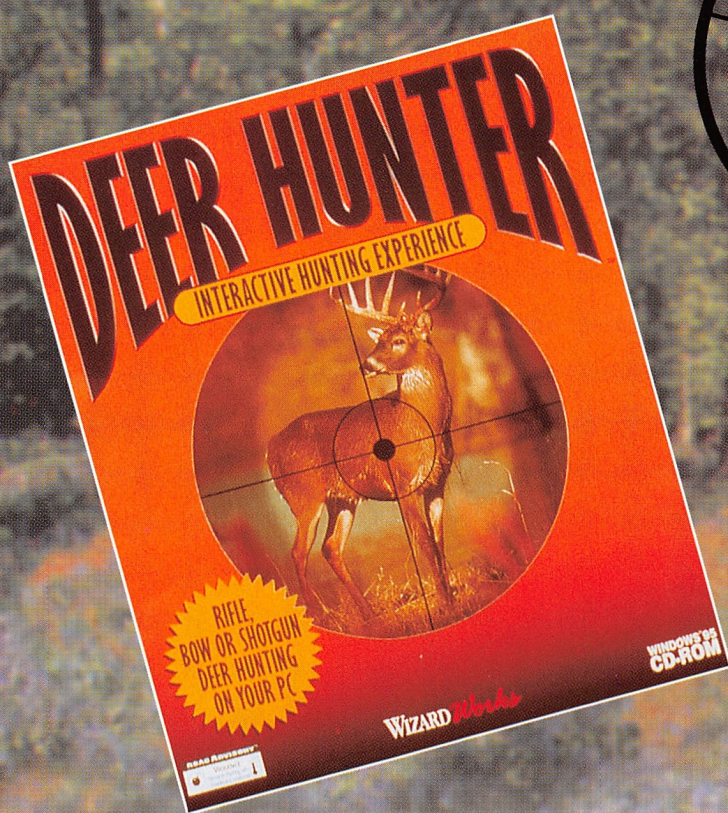
David Wildgoose

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